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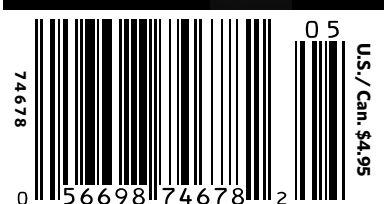
Rise Up!

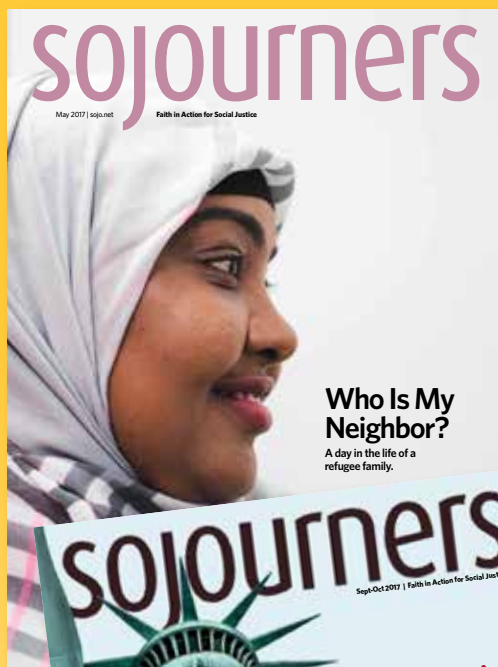
A moral movement for the 21st century picks up where Martin Luther King Jr.'s **Poor People's Campaign** left off.



PLUS:

Churches confront gentrification
'Cautious optimism' in South Africa
The trouble with identity politics





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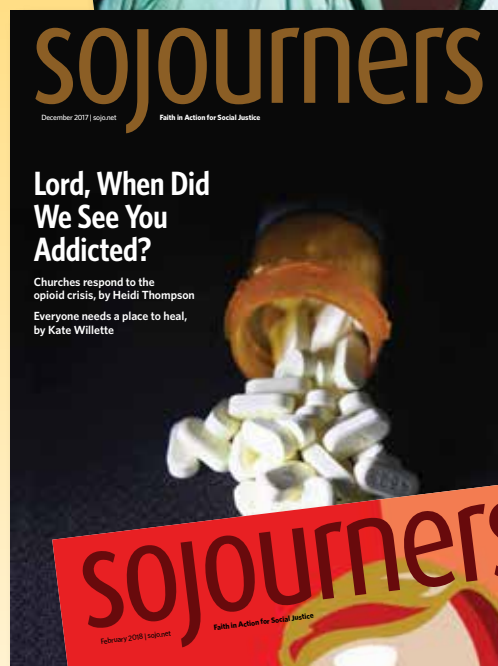
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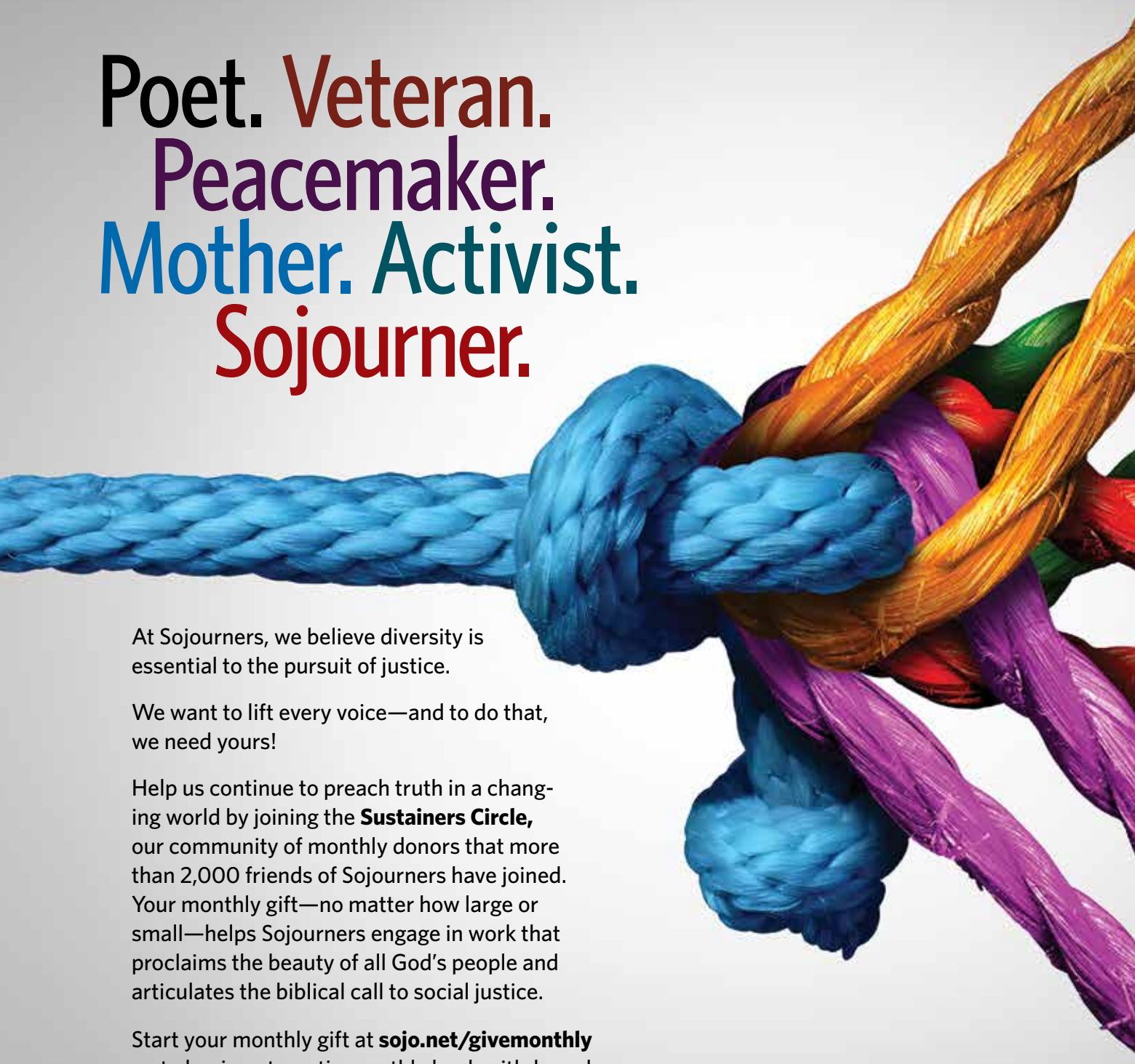
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'TIS THE SEASON of white hats, peace lilies, and alleluias, but this year columnist Kathy Khang captures our paschal mood: “It’s hard to live as an Easter people when we are so often reminded we live in a Good Friday world,” writes Khang in this issue.

Resurrection is indeed a slow business. Jesus rolled away the stone in three days, Rose Marie Berger reminds us, but when it comes to the things that entomb so many of us—“dehumanization, distortion, domination”—being raised back to life is slower and more subtle. Her advice? “Listen sharply for the many sounds of scraping stones.”

In this issue, you can hear rocks beginning to shift in church activists rising up in South Africa and students turning their grief and lament into a cry for stricter gun

control. It’s what Cory Pechan Driver describes as “the humble takeover possibility” of the Jesus movement: tiny mustard seeds that take root and multiply.

Our cover story explores a different sort of resurrection: the people breathing new life into the 1968 movement to end what Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. called the “triple evils” of militarism, poverty, and racism. The most visible people in this revived Poor People’s Campaign are its co-chairs, Rev. William Barber II, who started the Moral Mondays movement, and Rev. Liz Theoharis, who’s spent the last decade building a network of grassroots leaders through her work at the Poverty Initiative of the Kairos Center



for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice. But as author Betsy Shirley explains, the real story isn’t about Barber or Theoharis; it’s about how the campaign is empowering people who’ve long been denied economic and political clout. “If it’s not a place where poor and dispossessed people are

leading,” says Nijmie Dzurinko, who is helping coordinate the campaign in Pennsylvania, “then it’s nothing.”

“We are saying that we are God’s children,” King said in a speech to sanitation workers the night before he was assassinated, 50 years ago this April. “And if we are God’s children, we don’t have to live like we are forced to live.” Can you hear it? ■

Letters

Not Bowing Down

Thank you for publishing William Barber II’s excellent article “Make Babylon Great Again” (March 2018). The United States is being led by individuals who are only out for their narrow-minded and bigoted religious and political philosophy—one which gives nothing more than lip service to basic human needs while masquerading as Christian faith. William Barber II is spot-on explaining why “bowing down is not an option.” It is imperative that members of our society understand what is taking place and act accordingly.

Will Keller
Mesa, Arizona

Fighting the Good Fight

Rev. William Barber II’s article “Make Babylon Great Again” (March 2018) is perhaps the best of all the fine work you have published to date. I felt truly inspired while reading it. His analogies are spot-on. Thanks for all you do and for this piece in particular! Keep fighting the good fight.

Susan Thomas
Tucson, Arizona

Standing Outside

While I appreciate Jim Wallis’ article and his feeling of “homelessness” in the major political parties, I feel that the answer he provides in “Time for a ‘Moral Movement’” (March

How do you recover a word from a generation of abuse?

2018) is off base. The phrases “pro-life” and “anti-abortion,” as well as “evangelical,” carry such a fraught meaning due to the misuse of these terms. In the denomination to which I belong, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, there has even been talk of changing our name, as the term “evangelical” has come to describe a movement that is theologically and morally bankrupt. How do you recover a word from a generation of abuse? The other issue is whether those with prophetic ministries should ever feel comfortable in any political party. To be a prophetic voice means to be an orphan politically, to stand outside of any party, so that the truth may be told to all sides.

Gary Roth
Emlenton, Pennsylvania

Engaging with Greeks

In her commentary, “Beware of Greeks ...” (March 2018), Christina Colón seems to question why InterVarsity ministers within the Greek system, as if ministry to fraternity and sorority students somehow legitimizes the abuses that she describes. We disagree. Greek InterVarsity students regularly engage with and act against issues of sexual assault,

misogyny, prejudice, and addiction, as well as less talked-about issues like ethnicity, greed, and pride. They are a redemptive influence in their houses. This is what it means to be “both Greek and Christian.”

Joe Ho
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

Sewing Activism

I loved Kathy Khang’s column “A Stitch in Time” (March 2018). Like Khang, I was taught to sew at a very early age. Today, my sewing mission work consists of making dresses for girls in Africa and Appalachia, as well as small quilts that I then donate to local hospitals. Those “old fashioned” skills never go out of style. Rather, they find new “categories of activism and social justice work” where they can be applied. Thanks for your lovely thoughts.

Louise Monacelli
Farmington Hills, Michigan

“I have something to say about that!” Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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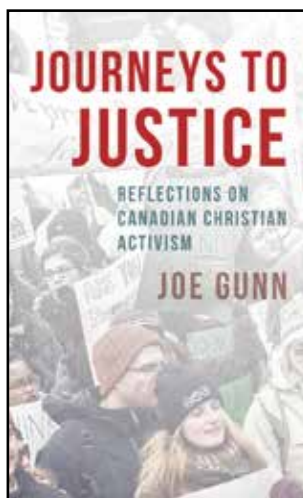
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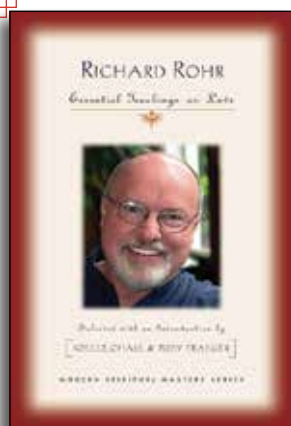
Current leaders of justice ministries will find guidance from these accounts, as well as inspiration from the newer generation of activists who reflect and act upon them.

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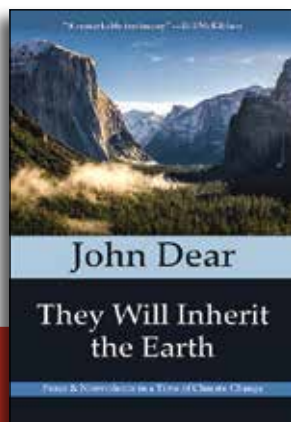
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BY JIM WALLIS

Changing the Narrative



DURING THE Easter season Christians commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, after the devastation of Good Friday, when Christ was crucified. From darkness to light, from pain to healing, from despair to hope, from defeat to victory, from death to life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation for our hope as Christians, even—and especially—when it's hardest to have any hope, like at a time such as this.

I often quote Hebrews 11:1, which says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," especially around Easter. I often paraphrase the text as, "Hope means believing in spite of the evidence, then watching the evidence change."

It's appropriate that, as Christians, we believe in a radical hope, a hope that often comes "in spite of the evidence." Easter Sunday, which we just

Sandy Hook in 2012 yielded no meaningful federal gun reforms, many felt that the gun debate was effectively over, and that the NRA had won. These brave Florida students have decided in the face of unimaginable personal trauma that "there's nothing we can do" is a lie and an unacceptable outcome.

They've launched a new movement of high school students who will soon be voters, organized major protests in Florida, Washington, D.C., and around the country, and given much needed hope to gun safety advocates that the NRA will not have the last word. They are changing the narrative, which is what will finally change policies.

ANOTHER ISSUE that has seemed hopeless much of the time, including demoralizing setbacks in 2018, is the debate over our country's broken immigration system. Despite the defeat of legislation that would have protected DACA recipients and other Dreamers and offered them a path to citizenship, these brave young people, who are Americans in every sense except their documentation, are continuing the fight to stay in the only country they have known and protect their families as well.

The way the Dreamers have told their stories and come out of the shadows since the Obama administration's establishment of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) in 2012 has led to overwhelming public support for them staying in the United States—as many as 80 to 90 percent of the American people support that. President Trump's deadline for ending DACA came and went in March, and the ongoing legal battles leave the status of the program—and therefore the ability of Dreamers to remain in this country with their families—in limbo.

And yet the Dreamers have

refused to return to the shadows and have also refused to be used as bargaining chips as this administration seeks to fundamentally restructure legal immigration in this country in ways that will keep families *apart*. Their courage has, again, changed the narrative, which will ultimately change policies.

The degree to which our society still operates as a patriarchy, and the reach of misogyny, toxic masculinity, sexual harassment, and sexual assault in our culture, can make it hard to have hope that these structural forces will be overcome anytime soon. And yet the #MeToo movement continues to force a reckoning for sexual predators, as powerful men in public life continue to be exposed and disgraced.

I have especially found hope in the Time's Up campaign, in which women in the entertainment industry—inspired by the stories and experiences of farm workers and others—have launched a legal defense fund for survivors in *any* industry experiencing sexual harassment or assault in the workplace who want to tell their stories and expose their attackers.

It is striking that it is precisely on these issues that seem so big and hopeless—and occurring in the context of an administration and a party that have proven explicitly hostile to addressing these systemic problems—we've nevertheless seen these signs of hope.

These examples remind us that the resurrection hope we have in Jesus Christ flies in the face of the evidence of this world, and yet we believe in spite of the evidence. Thanks to the courageous actions of the people most affected, we may finally be seeing some of that evidence change. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

The resurrection hope we have in Jesus Christ flies in the face of the evidence of this world.

celebrated, is the perpetual reminder of the hope that comes when things seem most hopeless. We Christians say we are a resurrection people, and Easter Sunday both reminds us and dares us to prove it—that we are a people who can live our lives in hope, despite the evidence.

In Parkland, Fla., students who survived the horrific mass shooting on Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School have decided that in the absence of leadership from older generations and elected officials in stopping the gun and mass shooting epidemic, they are simply unwilling to let their classmates' deaths be in vain.

After the horrible massacre at



South Africa's President
Cyril Ramaphosa
addresses parliament
in Cape Town.

Reuters

By Adam Taylor

'Cautious Optimism' in South Africa

Young Christian activists see promise in the nation's leadership change.

THE LONG-OVERDUE transition of power in South Africa this winter, from President Jacob Zuma to Cyril Ramaphosa, has sparked a resurgence of hope among younger church activists in the country. Zuma's nine years in office were catastrophic to South Africa's politics and social fabric through entrenched corruption and state capture. Zuma and his cronies enriched themselves while the economy stumbled, with unemployment now above 27 percent and schools and health care in an increasing state of crisis.

While Ramaphosa's election by the National Assembly has inspired hope, an awakening less heralded and potentially more significant long term has been taking place across the church in South Africa. The theology of hope and liberation that helped fuel the anti-apartheid struggle played a formative role in shaping the public theology of many in the U.S. and around the world. Now a new generation of South African Christian activists is on the cutting edge of social transformation.

In the aftermath of Zuma's resignation, a handful of these leaders addressed the catalytic role the church has played in shifting the political winds in South Africa

and their hope for the future.

Edwin Arrison, director of Kairos Southern Africa, pointed to the formation of the South African Christian Leaders Initiative (SACLI) as a turning point, along with the release of a document on "theological and ethical reflections" that was signed by hundreds of church leaders. After a meeting between key African National Congress figures and church leadership about the

"The church must engage but never be embedded."

statement, theologian Denise Ackermann said, "The church must engage but never be embedded" with the state. "Politicians will try to embed the church if they can," Arrison said, "but there needs to be a reasonable distance, otherwise you end up becoming a part of empire."

The Christian leadership initiative has provided a platform for a new generation of Christians to work alongside the institutional church. "After playing a significant role in helping South Africa escape from the captivity of the apartheid era," states the initiative's web site, "the South African church

has found itself in a two-decade wilderness period ... if the nation is to cross into the promised land, the church has an essential role in leading us through the Jordan."

IN 2015, South African churches launched "The South Africa We Pray 4" campaign, which concluded with the Council of Churches hosting an "unburdening panel" based on bearing "one another's burdens" in Christ (Galatians 6:2). The churches released a report on state corruption and hosted a series of public hearings for politicians to "unburden" themselves from corruption. According to SACLI leader Miles Giljam, "The unburdening panel was a tipping point that enabled broader society to push more forcefully for Zuma's removal."

Church leaders are cautiously optimistic about President Ramaphosa's leadership. They see him as more open to the moral leadership of the church because he was a close ally of Nelson Mandela and because he served as chair of the Student Christian Movement. Msizi Cele, a businessperson and SACLI member, said, "This is a special moment of renewal for us after 10 years of devastation that has

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eroded a great deal of good will.”

Arrison and other leaders see the current moment as moving out of seven years of hopelessness and cynicism into a new seven years of hope and greater resolve as the church works to address key challenges (such as malnutrition, education, the social safety net, equitable policing, inequality, and others) facing the country between now and the 30th anniversary of

South Africa's democracy in 2024.

Now is an opportune time to rekindle bonds of kinship and solidarity between U.S. and South African churches. We can once again take courage from the revitalized leadership and prophetic witness of Christians in South Africa. ■

Adam Taylor is executive director of Sojourners.

By David LaGrand

Imprisoned by Poverty

The cash bail bond system is undemocratic, immoral, and unfair.

I AM A CHRISTIAN. That means that I serve a savior who told us he came to free prisoners. At the same time, I live in a nation with more than 2 million prisoners, more than any country in the world.

I am also an affluent white person living in a country that unequally and selectively jails people of color and poor people. And I don't just *live* in this country, I help govern it.

As a state representative in Michigan, I am responsible for this situation. The government directly chooses who goes to jail and who doesn't. Of course, since our democracy practices government “of the people,” that makes all of us responsible for government actions.

How should Christians who are also citizens take action for justice in our law enforcement system? Responding to mass incarceration as Christians can seem daunting, but there are obvious places to begin. One of the clearest places our current system fails the test of equal treatment under the law is in the detention or release of those accused of, but not convicted of, a crime. At present, 49 states use some form of cash bail bond for accused people to gain pretrial release. Freedom comes with a cost—money must be deposited with the court or a hefty fee paid to bail-bond broker.

If a defendant cannot put up the cash, then they go to jail, while affluent defendants are released. For lack of a few hundred dollars, hundreds of thousands of people

are held in U.S. jails because they've been accused of a crime and can't pay the cash bond. Even a few days in jail means parents are unable to care for their children, and many lose their jobs or housing.

This is not a problem for members of my congregation or people I spend most of my time with. But we live in a nation where 57 percent of our citizens don't know where

they would find \$500 if they suddenly had a need for that much money. Posting even a modest cash bond is a hurdle that more than half of our country can't clear.

Liberty should not depend on wealth. Christians should act to correct

this injustice. Our states should move away from cash bond release mechanisms and implement good risk-assessment tools for judges to use at arraignment. Our courts should assess whether a person is a safety or flight risk when detaining people, not sort citizens by their access to cash.

Some states are re-examining the cash bond system. In Illinois, California, New Jersey, Maryland, and now Michigan, substantive conversations are happening around cash bonds. In my state, the effort to work toward equal justice for cash-strapped citizens is bipartisan. A Republican colleague working with me owns a big restaurant. He is tired of having employees missing work because they are held in jail on small cash bonds.

In fact, everyone I talk to about this issue is receptive, once the problem is explained. This is a fiscal problem and a conflict with

Thousands are in jail because they can't pay a cash bond.

From the Archives

May 2005

Holy Rest

HOLY REST challenges our individualism: It reminds us that we need each other. The manual for discipleship, if it existed, would come with a warning: Do Not Try This Alone. Christianity is fundamentally expressed in community. Jesus formed a community of disciples, he sent the disciples forth in groups, and he promised that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). The Holy Spirit descended in community, creating church. And our continuous process of conversion is both realized and expressed in community, for, as Tony Kelly writes in *The Force of the Feminine*, “to be converted, turned out of oneself toward that Universal Love revealed in Christ, is to be turned toward others who, one way or another, support or occasion one’s growth in conversion.”

In short, discipleship has never been a solitary endeavor, and even less so now. If we’re even going to try to live kingdom ideals in contemporary culture, we need time to gather as a community and immerse ourselves in “God’s culture.”

As we who follow Jesus try to balance our own call to work for God’s reign with our need to rest and renew, we can learn much from those who have so beautifully integrated the demands and gifts of their own faith. We can live discipleship as Matthew describes it: a balance of fully committed action in the world centered by the time to renew and rest in our fundamental identity as God’s beloved. ■

Michaela Bruzzese was a Sojourners contributing writer living in Chile when this article appeared.



our democratic principles, but it is also a moral issue. I like to think that some of the bipartisan positive energy for change comes from faith values shared by politicians that aren’t defined by party.

Because I am a Christian, party identity and party loyalties are never my primary concern. As the prophet Micah put it, we must be about building a world where

justice and reconciliation are one. Anyone who shares that agenda is my brother or sister, and anyone in need of the fruits of that agenda is my neighbor. ■

David LaGrand is a member of the Michigan House of Representatives and attends Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



By Alexandra Rosado-Román

What Hurricane María Revealed

The massive natural disaster showed how colonialism still ravages Puerto Rico.

IT IS INTERESTING, yet not surprising, what the political status of Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane María reveals about colonialism, the coloniality of power and gender, emergency government response, and civilian resilience.

Hurricane María was the worst natural disaster Puerto Rico has ever faced and the 10th-most-intense Atlantic storm on record. But Puerto Rico has experienced more than 500 years of colonial activity between the Spanish and North American empires. In addition, because much of Puerto Rico’s religion came to the island through colonization and violence, many Puerto Ricans today still struggle to trust religion and may not see religious organizations as options for help in times of adversity.

My experience in post-María Puerto Rico has made me aware of the still-present legacy of the struggle against white supremacy, racism, heteronormativity, and

sexism on the island. As an Afro-Puerto Rican feminist and Christian, I am aware of the ideological and religious struggles inherent in negotiating the nature of our citizenship with the oppressive political dynamics that are exacerbated by a massive natural disaster.

Hurricane María—and its sustained winds of 160 miles per hour—blew the neoliberal veil from the colonizers’ face. The limited response from the federal government in Washington, D.C., along with our unstructured colonial system, increased already-high poverty levels from 44 to 52 percent, according to the University of Puerto Rico, and swelled the numbers of people who left the island looking for better living conditions and a brighter future. After the hurricane, Puerto Rico’s status as an unincorporated U.S. territory blocked aid from several other countries, because the 1920 Jones Act only allows entrance to the island by U.S. ships.

Despite all this, the Puerto Rican people have demonstrated their resilience and capacity to overcome adversity. Citizen mutual aid, in partnership with nonprofit organizations and local churches, proved to be one of the most crucial and immediate forms of assistance after the hurricane.

A GROUP OF feminists in religious studies have been discussing the historical dangers of militarism—particularly when the military is sent on humanitarian missions. We have also focused on how eco-theology can restart conversations about replenishing nature, and held discussions on patriarchy, gender equality, and stewardship of the land. These

Hurricane María blew the veil from the colonizers' face.

conversations have increased our awareness of our *mulatez* (blackness) as a target of mistreatment by the U.S. government. They have empowered us to no longer accept the myth of the United States as “hero” and “savior,” and to call out the neoliberal fallacy that our imposed U.S. citizenship would necessarily bring “progress” and “wellness.”

María has shown us the importance of rooting ourselves in the rich legacy of the African diaspora—a legacy that too often has been used against us to sustain U.S. paternalism through racist ideologies and historical practices.

Half a year after Hurricane María, more than 500,000 people are still without electricity, the island is under a water advisory, and there are still families without secure housing. Yet, every day offers the opportunity to continue, individually and collectively, the fight to decolonize our minds.

As free people of faith, we must promote awareness of the history of colonialism, in Puerto Rico and elsewhere, and support the Puerto Rican people in their efforts not only to increase the visibility of their social, political, and religious struggles but to overcome them. ■

Alexandra Rosado-Román is a Ph.D. candidate in ethics and society at Vanderbilt University.

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verse of the day

But God proves [God's] love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
- Romans 5:8

voice of the day

God does not love some ideal person, but rather human beings just as we are, not some ideal world, but rather the real world.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

prayer of the day

Teach us to approach you without trying to hide, O God, for your love covers our sins.

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NEWS

High school students protest in solidarity with the victims of the Parkland, Fla. school shooting.



Getty Images

Active Lament

After the school shooting in Parkland, Fla., that left 17 people dead, the nation watched as grieving students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School boarded buses to demand that legislators take decisive action to end mass shootings. Faith leaders are standing with them. "God does not ask for moderate legislation intended to reduce body counts," wrote Presbyterian minister Benjamin Perry. "God demands guns' complete eradication." For more, visit sojo.net.

QUOTED

“We drive windows down so the music can get out and the Spirit can get in.”

—Charles L. Howard
on his road trip through West Africa

sojo.net/howard

VIEWS



Donald Trump Jr. during his recent trip to India

Associated Press

Hold Your Praise

When I hear people, most recently Donald Trump Jr.'s comments praising poor people in India, saying, 'I don't mean to be glib about it, but you can see the poorest of the poor and there is still a smile on a face ...' I think about my family, my ancestors, people who are coiled up in the very DNA that I hold," writes Sojourners associate web editor Dhanya Addanki, who grew up in a small village in southern India.

"And they smiled often," writes Addanki. "But they also cried, and got angry, and felt empathy, felt joy, and felt fear. They felt a whole range of human emotions because they were human beings with hearts, minds, and souls—just like the rest of us."

"When Western people, especially rich Western people, paint simplistic images of poor people in other countries, it denies them their humanity. It is out of touch and adds to the stereotype of thankful, happy, childlike poor people in other countries, denying them any other human emotion, feeling, or thought."

"It builds into a narrative that says all poor people in non-Western countries are simpleminded, dumb, one-dimensional caricatures who are unable to have more than one human emotion. Dehumanizing people happens in two ways: Either we make people villains or we make them noble, yet simple and unaware. Dehumanizing people by giving them such rigid structures of personality and emotion is problematic either way."

Read more at sojo.net/smiling.

He Is Risen! (Has Anything Changed?)

FOR ME, THE lasting image from Parkland was that of two women hugging, one still bearing the mark of the cross on her forehead. It was Ash Wednesday, the day the church prepares herself to understand and live into the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection, entering Lent through prayer, repentance, and the practice of other spiritual disciplines such as fasting or abstaining. The photo captured a sense of urgency, fear, relief, grief, and deep love. I cannot get that image out of my head.

We're now in the season of Easter, when Christians have broken their fasts—alcohol, chocolate, the internet, meat—and are done greeting one another with a call and response of "He is risen!" and "He is risen, indeed!" The woman whose picture I cannot forget—her ashes will have long been wiped away, but what of her fear and grief and possibly anger? What did she choose to give up for Lent and was that promise to abstain replaced with something else in the wake of the violence?

The 17 victims will have long been memorialized, but what will have been done for the survivors' guilt and trauma? Will we have tried



Parents wait for news after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla.

Associated Press

It's hard to live as an Easter people when we are so often reminded we live in a Good Friday world.

to guess at how long is long enough to wait before starting conversations about gun control, mental health, and policy changes? How will our country change, if at all? And what is God's invitation to us? Is God asking us to a longer season of repentance? Action? Both?

Right now, I feel in my body and in my prayers the dissonance and difficulty of claiming to be Easter Sunday people living in a Good

Friday world, because I am not sure anything will change. I am not sure that any legislators, national or local, will propose and pass any legislation, any changes that will protect children from someone (most likely a young white man) plowing through the school with an assault rifle.

It is one thing to prepare for a tornado or bomb, Mother Nature or an international enemy. It is entirely a different thing to know that the drills my children learned, standard in most public schools, are to protect my children from a human-made disaster—neighbors or former classmates possibly armed with assault weapons.

A Good Friday world normalizes active-shooter drills. A Good Friday world

shrugs our shoulders and says gun control goes against our Second Amendment rights. A Good Friday world tells children it is their responsibility to say something if they see something in a world that already dismisses people of color in their experiences of racism and women and their experiences of sexual harassment and assault.

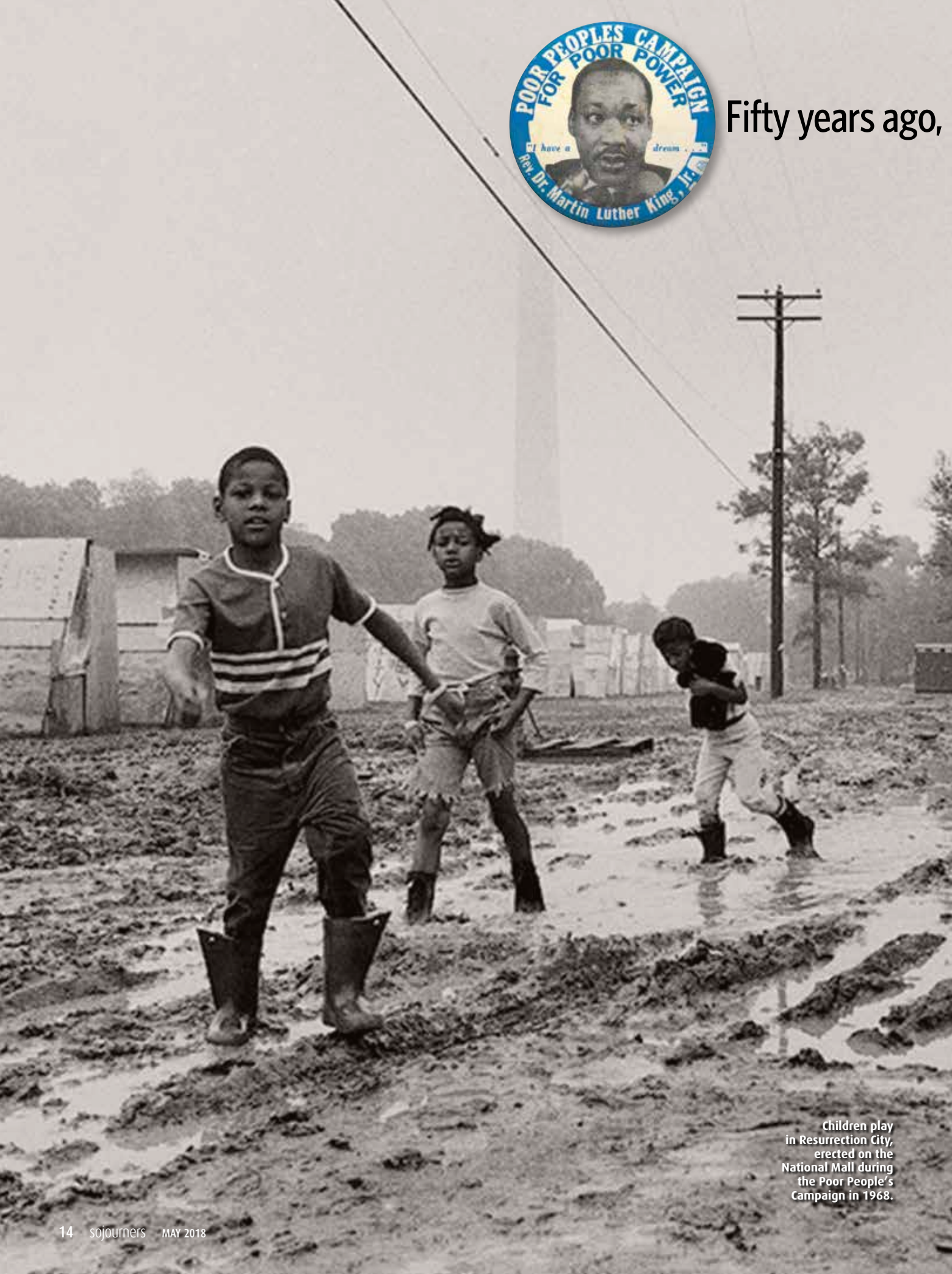
Right now, I don't know how to live as an Easter people when we have once again been reminded we live in a Good Friday world. ■



*Kathy Khang is a writer, speaker, and coffee-drinker in the north suburbs of Chicago. She is the author of the forthcoming book *Raise Your Voice*.*



Fifty years ago,



Children play in Resurrection City, erected on the National Mall during the Poor People's Campaign in 1968.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s last campaign ended in a muddy mess.

This spring, a new **Poor People's Campaign** picks up where the 1968 effort left off.

Rise Up!

by **BETSY SHIRLEY** • BY MOST MEASURES, THE DAY HAD been a success. On the morning of Dec. 4, 2017, nearly 300 people crammed into a small room near Washington, D.C.'s Capitol Hill to reignite the 1968 Poor People's Campaign. Camera crews filmed while clergy, Indigenous leaders, Fight for \$15, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and state groups from around the country pledged their support.

From there the leaders marched to the U.S. Capitol to deliver a letter condemning the then-looming tax bill. "Woe to those who make unjust laws," they read from Isaiah 10, "to deprive the poor of their rights."

Later, the same crowd—plus locals lured by a lineup featuring Sweet Honey in the Rock, Maxwell, and Van Jones—gathered at D.C.'s Howard Theater to celebrate. Faith leaders and activists who'd linked arms together in places such as Flint, Mich., Charleston, S.C., and Standing Rock in the Dakotas sipped drinks and ate free ice cream provided by Ben and Jerry's. The overall vibe was part social-justice pep rally, part family reunion.

But Rev. William Barber II wasn't feeling it.

The logo for the 2018
Poor People's Campaign:
A National Call for
Moral Revival



While the DJ played '80s hip-hop, Barber lumbered onto the stage unannounced. He didn't have a microphone, so he just started yelling. The perplexed stage crew scrambled to find a working mic, but Barber was impatient. The DJ cut the music and the theater grew quiet.

"My brothers and sisters," boomed Barber once he had a mic. "This is a Poor People's Campaign mass meeting and concert; this is *not* a party."

'Make this nation cry'

For the next 10 minutes, Barber worked his way through the litany of injustices that he and Rev. Liz Theoharis, co-chairs of the campaign, had repeated from countless pulpits over the past year as they crisscrossed the country recruiting people for the Poor People's Campaign: deaths caused by lack of health insurance, the rollback of voting rights, corporate drilling on Native American lands, homelessness, police violence, an unlivable minimum wage, Flint's inability to provide its citizens with clean water, political corruption. He spoke without notes, rambling at times ("I don't have time to be scripted because the evil that's happening is not scripted"), but it didn't matter; as he neared the end of his list, the mood of the room had grown somber.

"I'm a pastor, I *bury* people because of these politics and ain't nothin' *funny* going on right now!" said Barber. "But people are hippin' and hoppin' and jumpin' around like everything is okay."

The point, Barber concluded, is to be careful about the mood you're setting when



Rev. Liz Theoharis (left) and Rev. William Barber II, co-chairs of the 2018 Poor People's Campaign.

you're getting ready to fight. "We didn't come here for partying; we came here for consciousness," he said. "We came here to recruit people who are willing to do civil disobedience, who are willing to go to jail, who are willing to make this nation cry over the way people are being treated."

Then he asked those who were able to take a knee, Kaepernick style, in grief for America's moral failure. And nearly everyone in the theater—veteran activists, collared clergy, university students, old men with dreadlocks, young professionals, DACA recipients, parents with their kids, hippie grandmas with pink hair—knelt in response.

Fifty years later ...

In history books, the 1968 Poor People's Campaign is usually the tragic denouement in the narrative arc of the civil rights movement: the project Martin Luther King Jr. was working on when he was assassinated. But at the time, King envisioned the campaign as a radical new beginning, a broadening from civil rights to human rights, from the

particular struggles of the black community to the intertwined triple evils of poverty, racism, and militarism. Or, as King said in a speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff in May 1967, a shift from the "reform movement" of desegregation and voting rights to a "revolutionary movement" that would demand nothing less than "a radical redistribution of economic and political power."

So, the SCLC launched a campaign to unite the poor people of the country: "We will be young and old, jobless fathers, welfare mothers, farmers, and laborers," explained a campaign flyer, "we are Negroes, American Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, poor white people." You didn't have to be poor to participate, but the accent was on the leadership of those who were directly affected. "There are millions of poor people in this country who have very little, or even nothing, to lose," said King. "If they can be helped to take action together, they will do so with a freedom and a power that will be a new

Poor People's Campaign



"There will be change; it's just a matter of time."

and unsettling force in our complacent national life."

Fifty years later, this is the spirit of the campaign organized by Repairers of the Breach, a social justice organization where Barber is president, and the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice at Union Theological Seminary, where Theoharis is co-director: a multiracial coalition coming together as a "new and unsettling force" against the systems that

uplift is approaching spiritual death," King preached half a century earlier.

What's new is the urgency. Working with the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank dedicated to issues of peace, justice, and the environment, the campaign announced that it would release an "audit" in April combining empirical data—including increases in the percentage of people living below the poverty line, voter suppression laws, prison populations, and military

'My way to do something'

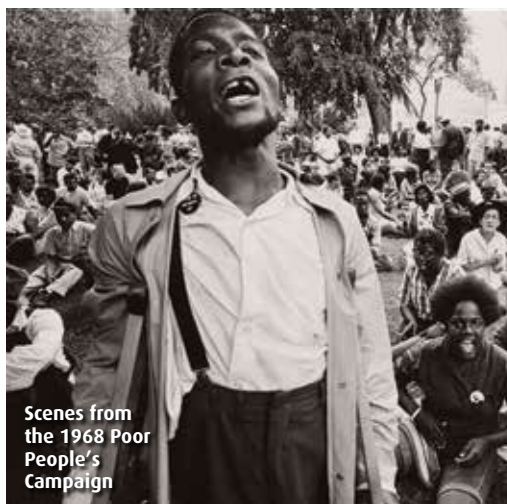
If all goes according to plan, thousands of people will take part in six weeks of non-violent action in the nation's capital and in statehouses around the country, beginning on Mother's Day 2018 (May 13). Many of these participants will be willing to risk arrest in what organizers say could be "one of the largest waves of nonviolent civil disobedience in U.S. history."

But what you won't see in May is the network of people who have worked behind the scenes, often for years, to make this campaign possible.

Phil Fonville may have the least glamorous job in the Poor People's Campaign. "This movement has been traveling around the country, ginning up enthusiasm for this campaign," said Fonville, a retired engineer and part-time photographer, "and part of that is getting people to fill out pledge cards of what they're willing to do."

Though the forms are available online, some folks still prefer pen and paper, so Fonville volunteered to manually enter the data from each card—name, contact details, willingness to be arrested—into what he refers to as the "big spreadsheet in the sky."

It's tedious work, but Fonville doesn't mind, even though it often requires a magnifying glass. He came to the Poor People's Campaign through the Moral Mondays



have long ignored them.

To the triple evils identified in '68, the 2018 campaign added a fourth: environmental degradation. But the charge leveled against the U.S. remains the same: America values wealth more than people. "We have the money, we don't have the moral capacity," said Barber in 2017. "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social

spending—with extensive testimony from marginalized groups around the country. "By many measures, what Dr. King called the evils of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism are worse today than they were five decades ago," said Sarah Anderson of IPS at the release of a preliminary report. "And if you add in climate change and other environmental threats, the findings are even more grim."



"We are the kind of scrappy you

movement Barber led in 2013; Fonville was arrested with Barber three times. "I've been kind of pissed off for decades, so it was my way to do something," he explained.

Real change doesn't start in D.C.

The real backbone of the Poor People's Campaign has been the patient work of community organizing. This is one of the campaign's core values: Real change doesn't start in D.C., it begins with the people doing on-the-ground work in their own communities.

"There will be no national campaign,

are leading, then it's nothing."

In 35 states, local leaders are educating people about the history of the campaign, hosting trainings in nonviolent civil disobedience, and coaching those who've been directly affected to tell their stories. "It is a bottom-up movement of people speaking for themselves," said Rev. Carolyn Foster, an Episcopal deacon working with the campaign in Alabama, "but many times they need help doing that because they have been so disempowered and hopeless."

Aaron Scott, a member of the campaign's national steering committee, agrees.

He emphasizes that people who've been shut out of traditional power structures—especially those from isolated and rural areas—often feel "incredibly alone" when they start to stand up for themselves. As an organizer with Chaplains on the Harbor, which works to pastor and empower homeless people in Grays Harbor County, Wash., Scott avoids a "charity

model" and instead seeks to ensure that the homeless community is involved in decisions that affect them. As a result, he's seen homeless folks who had never been involved with any form of activism begin imagining new possibilities, for themselves and for their town. "I didn't actually think it was possible to change anything in this town," members have told Scott.

Ultimately, he admits, "we're not big enough to create the changes we need to see in Grays Harbor," which is why Scott thinks the Poor People's Campaign is so important. "It's this idea of building local power in a really poor, really disenfranchised community while putting that community in touch with groups around the country that are fighting the same fights—and are starting to build power."

And realizing you're not alone can be transformative. At a recent meeting for the Poor People's Campaign, Mashyla Buckmaster told her story about how Chaplains on the Harbor was there for her when she was homeless, pregnant, and trying to get sober—and how, in turn, she'd been encouraged to stand up for the homeless community when town members made threats against their encampment.

When she finished her speech ("Hell yes, we're rednecks ... We're hillbillies for the liberation of all people ... We're here to stand shoulder to shoulder with anybody taking up this campaign, and trust me, we are the kind of scrappy you want on your side in a fight.") the crowd cheered, something that surprised Buckmaster. "It made me smile because I wasn't expecting people to react to it the way they did," she admitted.

Seven inches of rain

At age 74, Paki Wieland is likely to be one of the few people who will have participated in both the 1968 and the 2018 Poor People's Campaigns. Today, she's a retired social worker and professor, but in 1968 she was working with Appalachian Volunteers,



Marching in Kentucky for the Poor People's Campaign.

there will be no power at the national level, unless there's power at the state level in every state," said Nijmie Dzurinko, a coordinator for the campaign in Pennsylvania. "We have to develop leaders at the state level. Because if this campaign is not a place where poor and dispossessed people are comfortable, then it's nothing. If it's not a place where poor and dispossessed people



want on your side in a fight."

organizing among poor people in West Virginia mining towns.

Wieland brought a crew from Appalachia to join in the campaign and camp in Resurrection City, a temporary village the campaign built on the National Mall. Today, it's a field where intramural teams play ultimate frisbee, but in 1968 it was filled with rows of plywood structures including a daycare center, a bakery, a "city hall," and bathrooms. At its peak, Resurrection City was the temporary home of 3,000 people who had traveled to D.C. to participate in the campaign, including one group that caravanned from Mississippi by mule train ("Don't laugh, folks, Jesus was a poor man," someone painted on one of the wagons).

During the day, the occupants of Resurrection City took part in daily demonstrations at government buildings; at night, they ate and sang together, trading stories about their struggles for justice in their own communities. "Initially, the mood was very optimistic," said Wieland. "The sun was shining and people were coming from all over and there was this sense that this is really what America is."

But then, the rain. More than seven inches of rain fell on Resurrection City during its six-week existence; the camp turned to mud. And the organization of the campaign, tenuous after King's assassination, which had occurred just a month earlier, began to crumble. By the time a "civil disturbance squad" came to evacuate the camp, Wieland felt that a sense of "quiet despair" had overtaken the campaign.

Social movements aren't sports

For a movement of poor people to succeed, two things need to happen, said Frances Fox Piven, a professor of political and social theory: "You have to cause a certain amount of disarray, and you have to be an electoral threat." The former is important, said Piven, because poor people lack traditional forms of power such as money, authority, and social connections. When protesters occupy a government building or block traffic, they exercise the only form of power available to them: withdrawing their cooperation from social and civic institutions. The latter is important, said Piven, "because ultimately if the movement is to win specific policy concessions, they have to be shepherded by elected politicians."

But identifying specific policy goals for a coalition-based movement such as the Poor People's Campaign is a tall order. The organizers of the '68 campaign dealt with this by addition: As new groups joined the campaign, new demands were tacked on. The result was a sprawling, 59-page document that, predictably, didn't gain much traction with legislators. Consequently, the '68 campaign is rarely credited with much success.

The public and the media often judge movements by comparing their policy demands against their legislative wins, explained Gordon Mantler, a historian who specializes in 20th century social movements. But, said Mantler, the best measure of a protest movement is rarely its immediate political victories.

"We shouldn't look at social movements as sports games," he said. "It's not just about winners and losers. Social movements often don't achieve all their grand objectives, but it doesn't mean that they were a failure." He notes how the Occupy movement was roundly criticized for lacking a policy vision, yet it created language—the 99 percent, the 1 percent—that we still use today. As he sees it, reframing the conversation is the start of real change.

The 2018 Poor People's Campaign is taking a similar approach. "What will make this successful is what is already making this successful, and that's amazing grassroots leaders coming together and staying together," Theoharis said. "We don't see the end of the 40 days as the culmination or the end of the campaign; we actually see it as the beginning." But by the end of June, she hopes they will have "been able to shift the narrative and gotten people talking about the issues and having people imagining that something bigger could be done—that we don't just have to stay in our silos or limit our imagination based on what we think could be politically possible."

And for Buckmaster, that makes it worthwhile. "Barber said we're not going to see the change, but we have to keep trying," said Buckmaster, who is planning to take part in the Washington state Poor People's Campaign in May. "That made me feel good. It means that there will be change; it's just a matter of time." ■

Betsy Shirley is associate editor of Sojourners magazine.





Loving Our Neighbors (and doing something about it)

How churches are confronting gentrification • by D.L. MAYFIELD

illustration by KEITH NEGLEY

Gentrification doesn't look the same everywhere, but it is happening in most major cities in the U.S. And this isn't just about the brewpubs, the coffee shops, or even the "cash for houses" signs. As Peter Moskowitz writes in his book

How to Kill a City: "Gentrification is the most transformative urban phenomenon of the last half century, yet we talk about it nearly always on the level of minutiae."

The underlying connection is the economic reality: "Gentrification is a system that places the needs of capital (both in terms of a city budget and in terms of real estate profits) above the needs of the people," Moskowitz writes. This came up often as I talked with people involved in the complex world of housing and development.

Christian theology offers compelling reasons why individuals and communities can and must care about this dynamic. At the core of Christianity is the call toward love of neighbor. When the poorest of your neighbors continually face the brunt of a system designed not to care about them, gentrification becomes a church issue.

As demographics have shifted, public theology has failed to keep up. Tim Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in New York City, who currently serves as chair of Redeemer City to City (a sister organization that plants new churches in New York and around the world), understands that he has played a role in the growth of urban church planting. When he moved to New York more than 30 years ago, he told *Sojourners*, gentrification was not on his mind—because it wasn't yet an issue. But in the 1990s, that started to change as Redeemer saw more people of means moving in.

Now, Keller says, "If you are a church and you care about the common good, then you have to ask yourself: What can

we do to help?" He agrees with the stance New York City is taking: that warehousing people in poverty (grouping them in large concentrations) is bad for everyone and that mixed-income neighborhoods are the ideal.

To do this, Keller says, you need community and government policy pressure on developers and businesses to ensure the highest percentage of affordable housing possible. In reality, this approach "forces everyone to be unhappy," he says. Rents will still rise, some people will be displaced, and developers will have to allocate higher portions of their units to affordable housing. He thinks this should be the goal for *all* neighborhoods. "Affluent neighborhoods need to be mixed-income as well, which means they need to be building affordable housing and to work hard to make it happen."

Perhaps Keller can and should be a voice calling out in the wilderness of affluence—it is the very wealthy, after all, who are drastically shaping his adopted city in the most profound ways and need to be held accountable. Others, like Leroy Barber, a nonprofit leader and activist, are focused on listening to and recording the stories of those who are being erased from their own communities and neighborhoods. To Barber, gentrification is the newest iteration of the lack of investment in communities of color. "We allow it to happen," he says, "and then we ask



Gentrification is the newest iteration of the lack of

questions later about what we can do about it, after the damage is done.”

Barber doesn't see the church being at the forefront of this issue. The churches of color he has visited are primarily in reaction mode, lamenting their new reality. Are people starting to listen?

Shielding people from the market

Beliefs about how to best serve those most at risk for displacement continue to evolve. Habitat for Humanity, for instance, has started to change its approach in recent years, now focusing on entire neighborhoods and community-building by “preserving a supply of housing units that are permanently affordable or otherwise market-shielded.” This happens through a variety of means including subsidized housing, job creation, and grants, with programs, individuals, and governments all working together to maintain a specific number of families in housing. David Heddy, an employee at Habitat in Portland, Ore., says it is complex work, utilizing numerous strategies, organizations, and players—much like juggling 50 balls at a time.

Shielding people from the market has a distinctly Christian ring to it. Most who have studied gentrification bring up the expected caveats—every city is different, there are no quick solutions—and the sense that the market forces of capitalism cannot be stopped. If there is a profit to be made, then the wealthy will pursue it. So, people with a heart for communities have become crafty, and talk in terms of outsmarting or tricking destructive economic forces. Or, as Habitat has done, they see their role as being a barrier between capitalism and the families that are not able to keep up. In an age of ever-increasing inequality, Christians can proclaim people over profits and live out our stated beliefs of loving and caring for our neighbors, particularly when it comes to displacement.

How are churches responding?

Christopher B. James, author of *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil*, looked at how church plants operate in Seattle. Based off his studies, James says that “many church planters feel the same allure to gentrifying neighborhoods that real estate developers do—they see a place where their investment is likely to yield a good result.” He doesn't see the issue being that churches are causing gentrification (although he does liken their impact to that of a hip new coffee shop), but rather that it is primarily a theological problem: Christians not understanding the incarnation, resulting in “a failure to grasp what it looks like to join God in the renewal of all things from a position of ultimate solidarity with your God-given neighbors.”

Cole Brown helped plant a church in Northeast Portland, Ore., in 2006—when the historically black neighborhood was in the middle stages of gentrification. The church he helped

start wanted to exist as a “third neighborhood” as one community was pushed out and another moved in. Brown said that the “racial tension was intense, impossible to ignore” but that their church “became a safe place for people to know and be known, transform and be transformed, while the neighborhood outside was not safe for any of the above.”

According to Brown, in their church white gentrifiers got to know long-term residents of color who were experiencing financial constraints, with the result of some people sharing housing. Some members with means also purchased homes and rented at below-market rates to other members who were in danger of displacement.

Dr. Mark Strong has been pastor of primarily African-American Life Change Church, also in Northeast Portland, for more than 25 years. Gentrification has drastically changed his neighborhood. People have been displaced, and so have gathering places and iconic community spaces as people have been pushed to the outer edges of the city.

Strong says it has changed the mission of his church—now, to reach newcomers, they must work across cultural and ethnic

When the poorest of your neighbors face the brunt of a system designed not to care about them, gentrification becomes a church issue.

barriers. It is hard work, he says, but ultimately worth it. They are also planting a church in an eastern suburb of Portland, following displaced communities of color. Life Change embodies two responses in rapidly changing contexts: trying to adapt at their original location, and extending their mission to where their original community is resettling, so they can keep ministering in that population.

Institutional churches are also entering into the conversation, as evidenced by Tyler Sit, pastor of New City Church, a United Methodist congregation in Minneapolis. Sit, along with minister of public witness Dana Neuhauser, originally wanted to focus their church plant around creation care. They soon realized that gentrification was also a major issue that needed to be addressed. Sit says their church primarily combats the dehumanizing forces of capitalism and displacement by creating a worship time that allows people—including the myriad of burnt-out activists in the neighborhood—to connect with the love of God.

Neuhauser sees their church as joining in the transforming work of God in the world—both inwardly and outwardly. Minneapolis as a city is in a housing crisis, with a vacancy rate of less than 3 percent (the national average is 7 percent). New City is engaged in both policy advocacy and building personal and community relationships. They plant fruit trees in the yards of neighbors, a sign of abundance and long-term

investment in communities of color.

stability. They are working to build more backyard farms, concentrating wealth and income-generating elements for families who often need to work several jobs to pay rent. They are also thinking big—what would it look like to have a land trust, for instance, that kept housing perpetually affordable?

While it is encouraging that some churches are thinking through both the theology and practice of how to live incarnationally and shield people and properties from the market, they are still in the minority. And it also begs the question of why such shielding is needed. We can't address mass displacement without acknowledging why gentrification exists and is so extreme in certain cities.

Again, Moskowitz cuts right to the heart of the issue: "Gentrification is not about individual acts; it's about systemic violence based on decades of racist housing policy in the United States that has denied people of color, especially black people, access to the same kinds of housing, and therefore the same levels of wealth, as white Americans. Gentrification cannot happen without this deeply rooted inequality."

Christians, who espouse a theology of sin, should not be surprised at the brokenness that stems from policies that have privileged the white and wealthy for centuries. As we learn about the issues, may we also live as if the good news of Jesus means something to those who are experiencing displacement and the destruction of cultural and social centers.

Philippians 1:27 says to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of Christ." In the Greek, "conduct yourselves" means to "live as a citizen." To be engaged in your neighborhood, your place of witness. To work with your city to upend the ways of the world, and to see people valued over profits—this is an expression of faith that is urgently needed. ■

*D.L. Mayfield lives and writes in Portland, Ore., with her husband and two small children. She is the author of *Assimilate or Go Home: Notes from a Failed Missionary on Rediscovering Faith* (HarperOne).*

What Can We Do?

It is easy to feel overwhelmed or paralyzed by the systemic nature of how money and development works, or—if you are a gentrifier yourself—to feel guilty to the point of inaction. While each neighborhood and context may differ, individual Christians and congregations can live into beliefs and practices that help address the crisis of mass displacement in the U.S.

1. Be Your Neighbor's Keeper

Pastor Mark Strong believes the best thing Christians in a gentrifying city can do is to hear and understand the stories of their neighbors. In Portland, he says, most of the African-American churches have suffered in silence. White Christians have not been aware of the crisis taking place next door to them. Intentional relationships and active listening can begin to remedy this.

Finding and investing in ongoing relationships with people most at risk of displacement is vital. There are myriad ways to do this: living in lower income apartments, investing in the public schools, seeking out community organizers and grassroots nonprofits—and learning from local churches with long-term roots in the community.

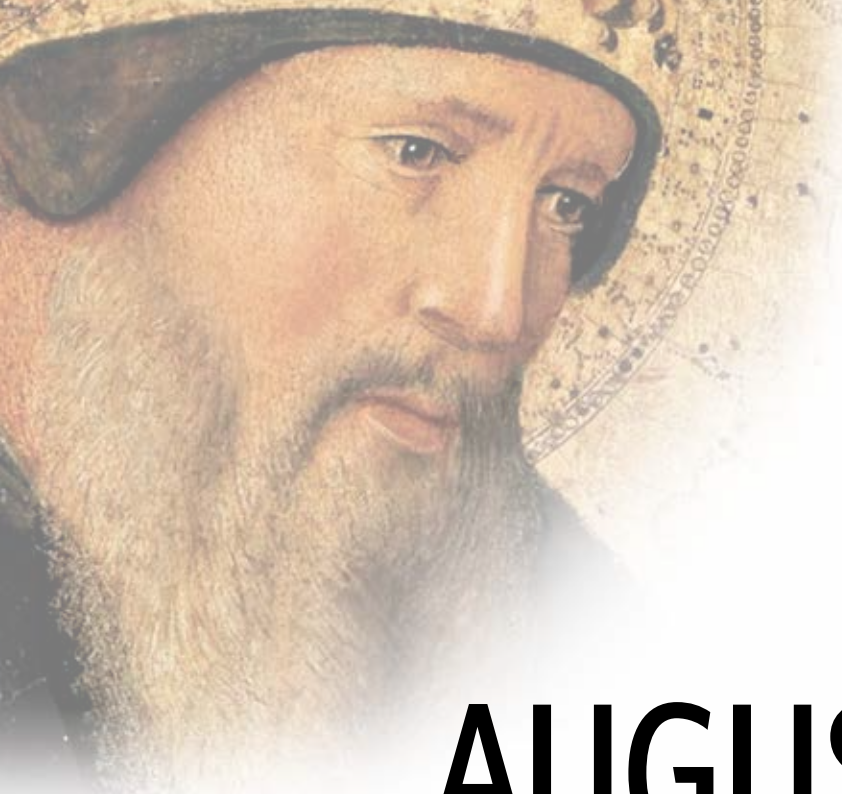
2. Know the Plan

Tim Keller advises people moving into a neighborhood at risk of gentrifying to see if a plan is in place to minimize displacement, and if not, to ask how one could be created. This plan—put together by the local government, nonprofit agencies, developers, and businesses, along with churches and community leaders—is vital to understanding both the issues specific to the neighborhood and ways to hold all accountable. Without a plan in place to shield properties and families from the market, middle-class and wealthier individuals will be directly contributing to gentrification.

3. Rethink the Role of the Church

Over a decade after he planted a multiethnic church, Cole Brown is interested in more organic, small-scale churches focused more on people and less on maintaining institutions. "An institutional church must use the money it *does* have to cover facility costs, insurance, payroll, etc. An organic church can pool all its money for the purpose of helping people (whether members or outsiders). In a gentrifying neighborhood, this could be used to help people remain in homes that they would otherwise be pushed out of or for any other needs."

In a city (Portland, Ore.) and a country that celebrates whiteness, Leroy Barber says that to him the best way the Christian church could reclaim a prophetic voice in the issue of gentrification is by focusing on affordable housing. "Churches are one of the largest landowners in our country—that is a lot of real estate that could be put toward housing people who are most vulnerable in our society, specifically black people." —DLM



AUGUSTINE, the *Mestizo* One

How I came to see St. Augustine as part of my family, like one of my uncles who lived next door • by MICHAEL JIMENEZ

"I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE MEXICAN?" "Oh, your dad is from Puerto Rico?"

These are probably the most common replies I received throughout my childhood, when someone found out my last name. At one point, exhausted of explanations, I started to reply in the affirmative to whatever Latin American country was chosen.

However, the response to my name has changed in the last 10 years or so. Now when I tell someone my father is from Costa Rica, the most common reply is about a vacation they took with their family, or that they know someone who plans to retire there. *Pura vida*.

However, this small Central American country did not represent a paradise for my father as a child. His childhood was rough. When my father was around 8 years old, one year shy of my oldest son's age, he was dropped off at a stranger's home. He worked for this family for almost a decade, a few of his relatives visiting on rare occasions. There is no nostalgia in the messy details of his recollection.

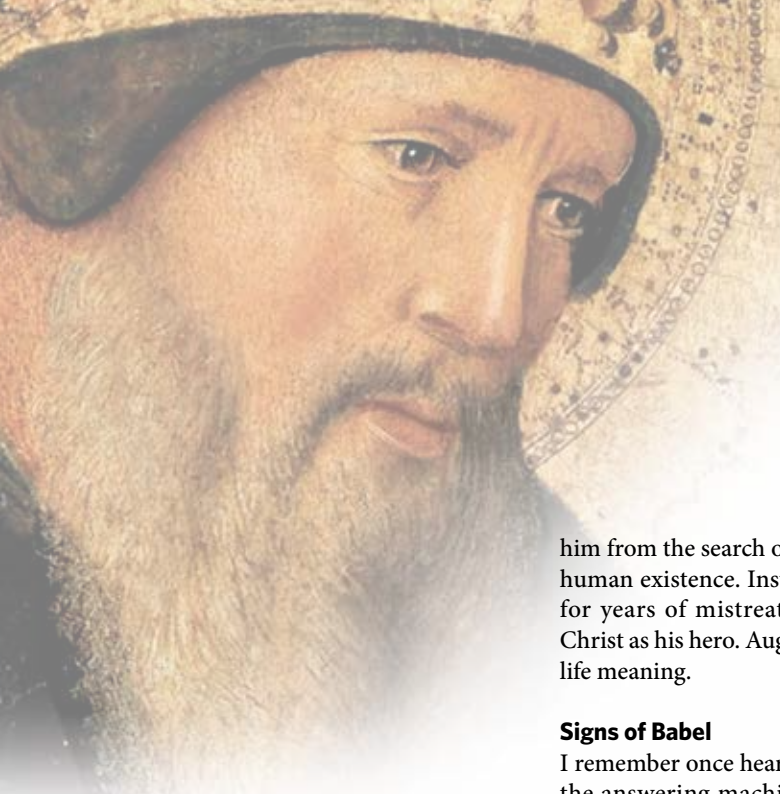
By his own estimate, God has since blessed him: He is now father, foreman, pastor, and, recently, grandfather. The U.S. was a refuge, a place of opportunity, for the man with a fifth-grade education who grew to read St. Augustine for pleasure and instruction after dinner. I grew up in that man's shadow.

The hardships he experienced as a child were denied his two sons: We had a happy childhood. I learned to accept my mundane, middle-class biography, realizing my script would not contain the dramatic details of my father's life. My Christian conversion story produces a yawn in even the most-sympathetic listener. My "rebellious" teen years—a manufactured mistreatment molded by myself—paled in comparison to the real struggles that my father went through.

It took a Latino theologian and historian to see the *mestizo* in Augustine's story and, by extension, the history of Christianity.



The author in Costa Rica.



The signs of Babel are evident every Sunday morning.

traces of an accent. I am more disturbed by the fact that she was calling a church. Was she someone who regularly attended church services? Theologians dream of unity among the Christian churches across the world, but language separates. The signs of Babel are evident every Sunday morning.

him from the search of the big questions of human existence. Instead of blaming God for years of mistreatment, he turned to Christ as his hero. Augustine's God gave his life meaning.

Signs of Babel

I remember once hearing a message left on the answering machine at our church. A woman called, looking for Calvary Chapel down the street, yet was given our number presumably because our church also had the name Calvary in it. My dad called me into the office to hear a frustrated woman aggressively scream, "Learn English!"

One of my favorite pictures of my father when he was younger is a photo of him with his *abuela* (grandmother). I never met her. Out of the few black-and-white photos of my dad that we have, this is the only one I can recall that he is smiling. He decided to take the Jimenez name because of his *abuela*. He eventually left Costa Rica in the late 1960s; after his *abuela* died, nothing tied him to the country.

In the U.S., he heard the command to "take up and read" to discover that the New Testament was like no other book. After the New Testament, he returned to St. Augustine, but read him with different eyes. He discarded numerous religious and philosophy books that left his soul empty. But not St. Augustine.

When Augustine was a young man, he was hounded by his mother, Monica, to become a Christian. She followed him everywhere. Augustine wrote about this narrative in his *Confessions*, describing how Monica and her God finally won him over. There wasn't a Monica in my father's life who sought him out. However, like Augustine, my father heard a voice telling him to read the New Testament, and it won him over.

Augustine's opening line to his *Confessions*, about the restless heart only finding its rest with God, is my father's life motto. He's a searcher. Somewhere in Costa Rica, the boy did not let his own lack stop

This was her reaction after hearing my dad's 15-second recorded message. In response, my dad gave me a reassuring smile, communicating to me that this was just some silly, misguided woman.

There is a certain cruelty and contempt in that command to "Speak English" directed at a stranger on the other side of the phone recording. Would she respond the same way if the pastor with the accent actually picked up the phone? I imagine only kindness if she heard my Americanized voice, with no

The mestizo one

I think we remember Augustine because he wrote a story. It is the best type of non-fiction: narrative that reads like fiction. He relies on memory to tell his tale, famously making stealing fruit sound like a capital crime. His honesty is refreshing. Augustine teaches us that the narratives of our lives have theological ramifications. Theology is biography and vice versa.

Recently, the eminent Latino theologian and historian Justo González wrote *The Mestizo Augustine*. The book details the basic biographical information of Augustine's life and his voluminous works and examines him under the lens of his mixed (*mestizo*) identity. González's book is important to me because it made me see Augustine as a part of my family, like one of my uncles who lived next door. It took a Latino theologian and historian to see the *mestizo* in Augustine's story and, by extension, the history of Christianity.

Now, when I teach history or theology, I point out that there are books worth reading by people outside of Europe, people

with last names like González (or Jimenez). The evidence of my father's love of God (and of Augustine) is his worn-out copy of Augustine's *Confessions*, barely held together by tape. This is all the evidence I need that books matter. I have several of my father's theology books on my bookshelf, and one day they will be handed over to my sons. They will know the story of Augustine, the *mestizo* one. ■

Michael Jimenez holds a Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary and is the author of Remembering Lived Lives.



The author's father, Miguel (center), with Miguel's grandmother and two of his brothers, circa 1960.

Family photo



Crossing the Jabbok

Unsure of my crossing, I stand and wait at the Jabbok
In a wrestling rhyme of rapids. The waters from the river
Rise around my fears and blur my eyes. I am uncertain
Where my footfall will land. My sandal slides turning on rocks.

I watch others cross ahead of me with obedience,
While I drop back to the crisis I find lurking
In the shadows of my soul. A drought-coward spirit
Dries up the will and burns through my identity
Destroying the brittle nature of my grip on this land
That waits on the other side of the river.

I am stalking through the darkness of my soul
For the person waiting beyond my dreams. The twin
Shadow of a birthright slips through my memory.
My father's blessing evaporates in my mother's maneuvers of facts.
My brain is a soup of deception: my mind is a sheep blind
Without a shepherd to open the gate. Unvoiced by silence,
I wait, unable to cross, paralyzed and unprepared without a prayer.
The void of doubt drifts into night where demons perch
In my dreams foaming at the ford of the river in my head.

From the shadows, flesh forms an equal partner to my fear
As I wrestle through the night. Clouds curtain the moonlight
On the man matched in this grip. I grab his leg for a takedown.
He turns his shoulder then twists my ankle into syllables of agony.

I pull back on his arm. At dawn he throws me with a hip heist.
Deep pain hollows out my thigh, dislocated, out of joint I hold on
For day breaking light. A voice speaks from this sweat: What is your name?
I utter: Jacob. You are no longer Jacob, he affirms. I leave
Behind my fear and limp forward knowing I have seen God.
I cross the Jabbok with a name whose sinews will endure
The peace making between brothers in a place beyond the river.

Photo by Lothar Schulz/Getty Images

Kemmer Anderson, author of Songs of Bethlehem: Nativity Poems, has taught for 40 years at the McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tenn.





A Humble Revolution

**Why would Jesus
compare the reign
of God to
an agricultural
act of subversion?**

A BIBLE STUDY
by **CORY PECHAN DRIVER**

THE PARABLE OF the mustard seed is beloved, but also dangerous. Like most beloved scripture passages, its revolutionary impact on its original hearers has been weakened over time, replaced by sentimental fondness.

Originally, the parable would have promised restorative justice to the economically afflicted, an undermining of borders and boundaries to the religious purists, and a warning against exulting oneself. Part of the genius of Jesus' parables was to speak on multiple levels to multiple groups with the same words.

Noticing Jesus' audiences for this teaching is profoundly important.

Jesus was teaching in a gathering that included at least some religious leaders (Pharisees and scribes; see Matthew 12:38).

An overflowing bowl of brown mustard seeds.

Leaving the house in which he was speaking, Jesus went down to the water to address an even larger crowd (Matthew 13:1-2). In his audience for the parable, there were a mix of religious leaders and ordinary people, including farmers of the fertile Galilean hills. Jesus used their respective expertise to provoke the different groups.

Tenant farmers

Jesus said the reign of God is like a mustard seed that a farmer took and sowed in the field. The agricultural workers who heard Jesus would have scoffed at this.

No one would ever sow mustard seed into any ground one owned. First-century farmers in Galilee with any agricultural acumen knew that mustard is a weed that reproduces rapidly and spreads indiscriminately. It chokes out other more-valuable crops and ruins the land for other uses. No farmer who loved the land would have planted a single seed of mustard in the field.

First-century farmers knew from Jesus' story that the planter must not be a farmer who cared about the land, but someone who didn't know *anything* about

stewarding the land.

Only one group in first-century Judea and Galilee had access to land and fit this description: landlords who seized the land of their tenant farmers. The widespread nature of seizure of small holdings from peasants and concordant concentration of land-wealth in the hands of a few, rich owners was particularly cruel in Galilee, where Jesus was teaching on the mustard seed (see David A. Fiensy's *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period*). Seizure of land—separating people from their livelihoods and decreasing farm productivity—caused food shortage, economic inequality, an increase in poverty, and widespread banditry, themes that occur repeatedly in Jesus' ministry.

The modern allegory to this shocking description of land seizure and terrible environmental stewardship by people who cared for neither the land nor the

Surrendering
our cherished
boundaries is messy,
confusing work.
But at the same time,
it is holy and
necessary.

of the air find their rest.

The birds, in this case, are understood to be the same peasants, who—like birds—have no connection to the land anymore. They have been disinherited. For the farmers, the revolutionary promise of the parable is that, even after they have been dispossessed of their land and the land has been ruined by foolhardy and greedy landlords, the farmers will miraculously find their rest and peace again. The modern equivalent would be

Native Americans on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation having *all* their lands restored to them.

The reign of God is like when land is stolen and used foolishly, but God returns the people to their rest.

Religious leaders

Farmers were not the only people in Jesus' audience. The religious leaders also knew that mustard plants spread quickly and beyond limits, without discretion.

For this reason, planting mustard in enclosed garden plots or near fields of grain was specifically prohibited (Mishnah Kilayim 2:8, 3:2). Even though there were other areas where mustard was allowed, scholars understand that the concern that mustard would spread was so great that eventually its planting was prohibited as a matter of practicality in

Jewish-held Judea and the region of Galilee.

The mustard plants surely go wild, overrun their boundaries, and violate the instruction from God on Sinai to always plant with clear separation of species. New Testament scholar William Herzog puts it this way: "Once sown, it spreads like a weed, causing havoc on the ordered garden of the land. It also throws purity boundaries into confusion precisely because it spreads indiscriminately, thereby violating the prohibition against planting two kinds of seed in the same field (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9). The mustard shrub becomes an agent of confusion and source of uncleanness."

How can this be the model for the reign of God? To the religious leaders, Jesus' description of the reign of God threatened to disrupt the distinct practices that bound together the Jewish diaspora. Further, they understood the "birds of the air" in this instance to be one half of the formulaic curse to destroy and

"The Reign of God is Like ..."

Another parable Jesus put before them, saying, "The reign of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." —**Matthew 13:31-32**

people being dispossessed of it is the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline on Indigenous land. "The reign of God is like a leaky oil pipeline that a man built on his recently seized land ..." gives the modern hearer a rough approximation of how deeply unsettling this teaching would have been to the first-century dispossessed farm workers.

To a peasant whose land had been seized by a clueless and careless landlord, Jesus' description of the reign of God was at first disheartening, but it also contained a note of eventual justice. Those who stole your livelihood will eventually lose the profitability and usefulness of their lands. Like an oil pipeline, the mustard tree ruins the land and causes the value to plummet, and within a generation after it is planted (or built) is rendered obsolete and offensive to all who encounter it.

The planting of the mustard tree is not the end of the parable, but only a means to the final detail that offers hope. The culmination of the parable is that birds

defile punished human bodies (see Deuteronomy 28:26, 1 Samuel 17:46, 1 Kings 14:11). For a corpse to be left unburied and exposed to predators (wild animals and birds) was a ritual act of defilement. Jesus described the reign of God as an invasion that rapidly reproduces and thus obliterates the orderliness of life from top to bottom, from sky and land. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus upholds the religious leaders as models, saying, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." But here he challenges those listening to him to bring out their treasure for the living and let go of what is dead.

Some religious leaders today are concerned about distinct customs or cultural assumptions that may be disrupted by unauthorized entry into their land. Their concern is not invasive species of plants, however, but people.

There are Christians who support religiously based travel bans, deportation of law-abiding immigrants, and massive expenditures to build walls on borders. They fear a takeover by those who are "not allowed" to be in the land. They fear an eventual triumph over distinction and exceptionalism.

Jesus provokes us, saying, "The reign of God is like a woman who built a welcome center for refugees and undocumented immigrants on her land. As it grew, it became a home for anchor-babies and chain migration."

The reign of heaven is like when life that has been kept out and segregated is allowed in and thrives. Surrendering our cherished boundaries is messy, confusing work. But it is at the same time holy and necessary.

An invasive species

The members of the Jesus movement would have heard still a third message, distinct from that heard by the landless farmers and the religious leaders: The reign of heaven has humble takeover possibility.

The mustard seed, which is quite small, becomes the largest shrub and "becomes a tree" (at three meters, it could grow taller than many acacia and varieties of olive trees). That said, it stays a mustard tree and will never grow to be the tall, strong, impressive, and valuable cedar trees of neighboring Lebanon.

The mustard tree does just one thing: reproduce small seeds that grow quickly, then take over any place it is planted. The reign of God is to be characterized

Jesus'
words are a comfort
for the oppressed and
a description of the
way the reign of God
spreads: through
humility.

by the way it reproduces and takes over, rather than how tall or impressive it grows.

In this sense, Jesus' mention of the birds of the air is not an accident, but a clever reference to other trees in scripture that host birds. In Ezekiel 17, Ezekiel 31, and Daniel 4 the kingdoms of Judah, Assyria, and Babylon, respectively, are all described as tall, proud trees that host birds in their branches. Each of these lofty, beautiful trees was eventually cut down, however, because of the excessive pride of their rulers.

The image of a self-exulting tree or kingdom prompted the prophet Daniel to say, "Therefore, your majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: *Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed.* It may be that then your prosperity will continue" (emphasis added, Daniel 4:27). The temptation to pride and self-exulting over the "little people" frequently proves impossible for rulers to shun—and Babylon, like the other kingdoms, fell because of it.

The contrast between the reign of God as a humble mustard tree and the empires of the earth as tall cedar trees could not be starker. Jesus' mention of "the birds of the air" calls to mind the scriptural arguments that those who exult themselves will be made low. But then he continues, saying the reign of God has more in common with a humble shrub that spreads quickly, without regard of purity issues, and will provide rest for the dispossessed. This tree does not become lofty or exalt itself. The reign of God is like a tree that never overshadows others, but merely reproduces and spreads by staying humble.

Jesus' words, as always, are a comfort for the oppressed, a challenge to those who value uniformity over people, and a description of the way the reign of God spreads: through humility.

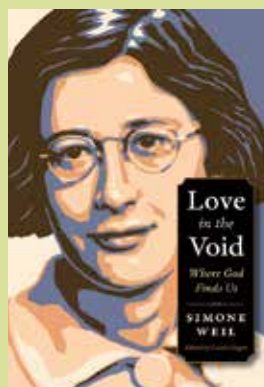
Jesus' challenge in the parable of the mustard tree is threefold: comforting victims of economic oppression; valuing the outsider more than order; and remaining focused on the horizontal growth of God's reign, not the aggrandizement of persons, institutions, or religious fads. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ■

Cory Pechan Driver is an adjunct professor of North African history and religion. He is a rostered ELCA deacon waiting for his first call and lives with his family in Rabat, Morocco.



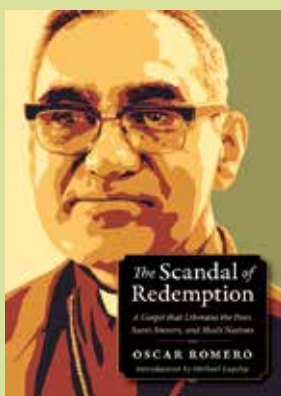
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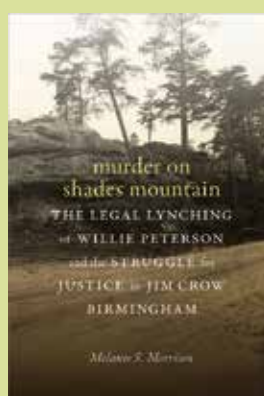
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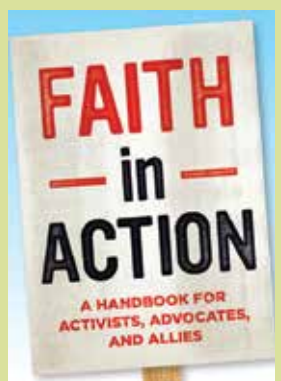
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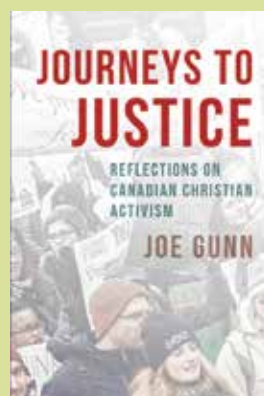
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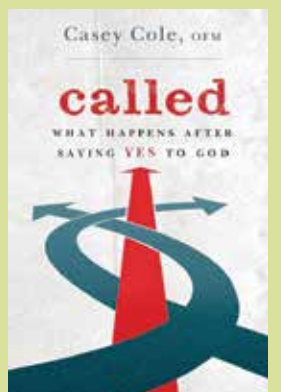
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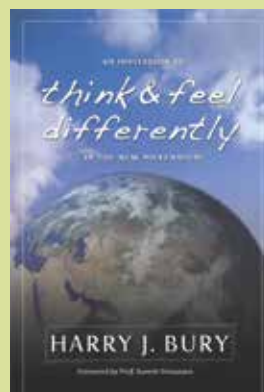
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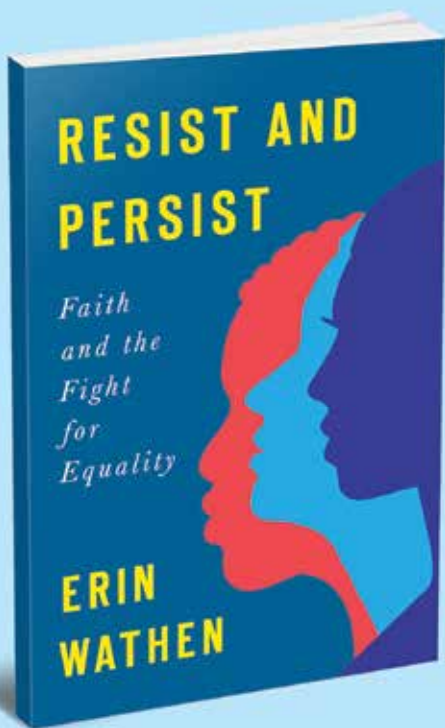
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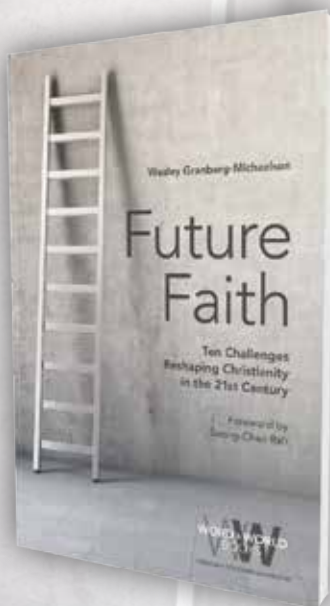
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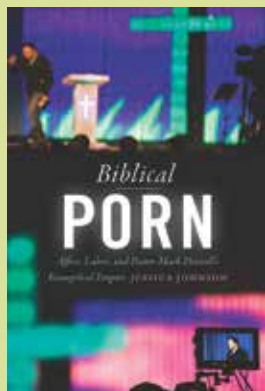
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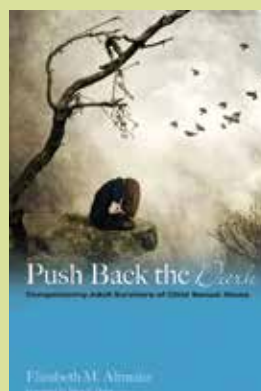
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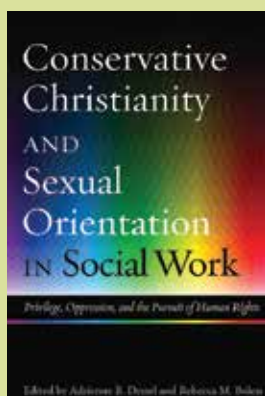
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Elizabeth M. Altmaier

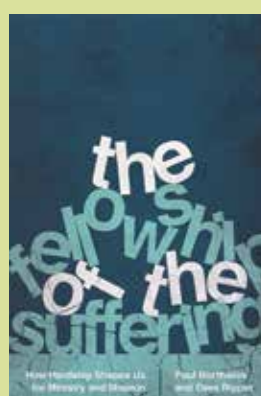
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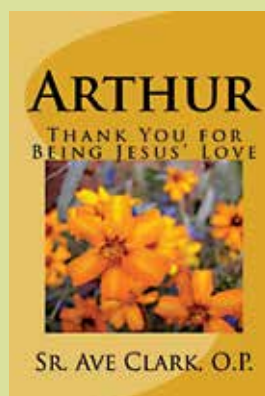
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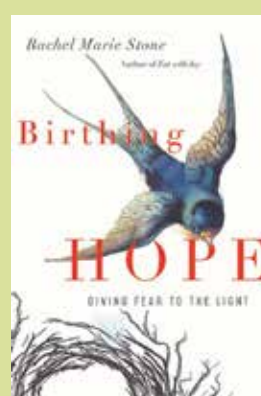
Missionary Paul Borthwick and pastor Dave Ripper show how transformation through personal pain enables us to minister faithfully to a hurting world. We can become powerful witnesses to Christ as a result of our brokenness. InterVarsity Press
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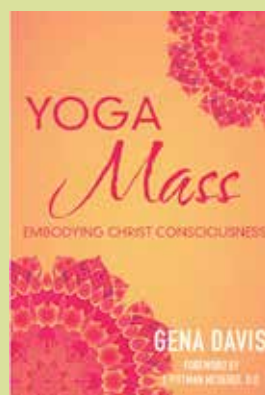
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Birth is a profoundly hopeful act of faith, as new life is brought into a hurting world. In these reflections on the mysteries of life and death, Rachel Marie Stone grapples with human suffering, global justice, and maternal health. InterVarsity Press
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YogaMass: Embodying Christ Consciousness

Gena Davis

Embracing the mind/body/soul/spirit connection reveals a path to wholeness and deeper connection with God. YogaMass bridges yogic principles with Christian theology and worship, offering a fresh perspective of Christianity that illumines an embodied spiritual awakening. Balboa Press
Amazon.com



A Poetry of the Soul

Ken Gible

Ken Gible writes out of an artful understanding of God and humanity in this soulful collection of story-shaped poems. These literate slices of life, both familiar and strange, invite deeper reflection on the human condition. Brethren Press
brethrenpress.com



The Trouble with Identity Politics

A RECENT *Washington Post* article describes a group of 200 people of color rallying in front of the White House on immigration policy. They carried signs about President Trump and chanted slogans related to the Dreamers. Can you guess the content of their signs and slogans?

The article explains that the chants at the rally included “Indians Love Trump,” and the signs called for legislative movement on DALCA, not DACA. (The “L” stands for legal, and speaks to the residency situation of this group of largely highly educated tech workers.)

This is a group that *likes* the Trump administration’s immigra-

But if I didn’t like them carrying signs that implicated me, shouldn’t I be opposed to all identity politics? After all, wasn’t this group simply following the logic of identity politics to the letter? Because they hold identity X, they claimed a special authority to speak on issue Y, with the understanding that their position Z should be taken especially seriously.

And they used language in a way (“Indians Love Trump”) that implicated not just the group who showed up, but all the people who happened to share identity X. In the case of Indians, that number would be north of a billion.

Frankly, I’m so used to this identity-politics logic model when it is used to support progressive conclusions (conclusions I generally share) that I wouldn’t have even looked twice at this article if the group had been protesting Trump immigration policies instead of supporting them. And I probably wouldn’t have minded so much that their signs implicated me.

This is, after all, the model so many discussions on campus follow these days.

“Latinos believe that Trump’s immigration policies discriminate against their communities.” “Black people believe the criminal justice system is racist.” “Women want to control

their own bodies and are therefore pro-choice.” One’s identity confers authority, both to speak for a wider circle and to take a position on an important issue.

What happens when that same identity-politics logic model is followed—but in a direction you don’t like, toward a conclusion that you find repugnant? What happens, in other words, when your favored group speaks on a topic of intimate concern, implicating you, but does not hold your preferred worldview?

Latinos who call for a border wall? African Americans who support stop-and-frisk? Women who are pro-life? Indians who worship Trump because he saves them money on taxes?

It’s not like such people don’t exist. Do we say that they are not true Latinos or African Americans or women or Indians? Do we find ourselves in the uncomfortable (and, I believe, untenable) position of saying that the only true Indians/Latinos/etc. are the ones who both share the ethnic category and agree with our progressive worldviews?

Do we call into question the logic model of identity politics? ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American of Indian heritage.



What right did they have to implicate me in their retrograde views?

tion agenda. Actually, based on the article, it appears that they like a lot of policies being advanced by the Trump administration.

When is the last time that you associated a group of people of color protesting outside the White House with *support* for President Trump? Well, there they were.

I found myself especially offended at this group because they carried signs that said things such as “Indians Love Trump.” I’m an Indian, and I certainly don’t love Trump. What right did they have to implicate me in their retrograde views?



By Brian J. Walsh

Dangerous **Angels**

Bruce Cockburn's long, prophetic musical pilgrimage.

IF YOU WRESTLE WITH ANGELS, you will end up with a limp. When you struggle with God, engage the divine in lament-filled argument, cry out to the Creator for justice, hang on and refuse to let go without a blessing, you'll end up with a posture bent over from the struggle and an uneven gait. Just watch Bruce Cockburn come onstage and you'll see what I mean.

Known for hits such as "Wondering Where the Lions Are" (from the album *Dancing in the Dragon's Jaws*), "Rocket Launcher," and "Lovers in a Dangerous Time" (both from *Stealing Fire*), Cockburn's evocative lyrics, exquisite guitar virtuosity, and unique blend of folk, jazz, and rock has brought him numerous awards and accolades over the years. More than 30 albums and close to a half century of touring would take its toll on anyone.

But there is more going on in the career of this Canadian singer-songwriter. The quiet Christian spirituality discerned in some of his early work was broken open in the 1980s when he first visited Central America. Revolutions and dirty wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala opened his eyes to U.S. imperialism and the oppressive structures of global capitalism. Looking further abroad he became an advocate for ecological justice and the international banning of land mines. Closer to home Cockburn has railed against white nationalism married to the Religious Right while also passionately embracing the cause of Indigenous justice.

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Singer-songwriter
Bruce Cockburn

Denna Bendall

We haven't heard much from Cockburn over the last few years. Writing his 2014 memoir, *Rumours of Glory*, took up so much creative energy that songwriting dried up for a while. But the muse returned, and the result is a new album, evocatively titled *Bone on Bone*: A reference on one level to the arthritis that afflicts Cockburn (though his guitar playing is still stunning), but perhaps more so to the wear and tear of a life of pilgrimage and a spirituality of resistance. A life of wrestling with angels.

A price is paid for deeply engaging the world's suffering, seeing what is just beyond the range of normal sight, and bearing witness. Walter Brueggemann writes that prophets offer "symbols that are adequate to confront the horror and massiveness of the experience that evokes numbness" as they "speak metaphorically but concretely about the real deathliness that hovers over us and gnaws within us." The prophets, and their poetic singer-songwriter descendants,

shake us awake when the powers-that-be prefer us to sleep. Many have recognized Bruce Cockburn as a prophet, even if he would demur at such a description.

When gloom and danger descend on the affairs of humanity, the dimming light can lull us to sleep. But in one of his most memorable lyrics, Cockburn sings that we've "got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight." One interpretation of this 1984 song, "Lovers in a Dangerous Time," is that the evils done in Central America by the Reagan administration required aggressive resistance. In "Santiago Dawn" (*World of Wonders*),

**No wonder he sings of an
"aching in my hipbone"—
that's what happens when
you contend with angels.**

he dreams of the dawning of liberation in Pinochet's Chile as the "creatures of the dark, in disarray / fall before the morning light."

But Cockburn knows that externalizing evil thoughts and deeds, projecting them onto our opponents, is too cheap. We are all "hooked on a dark dream" ("Dweller by a Dark Stream," *Mummy Dust*). In "The Whole Night Sky" (*The Charity of Night*), Cockburn sings, "derailed and desperate / how did I get here / hanging from this high wire / by the tatters of my faith." Like a psalmist he confesses, "look, see my tears / they fill the whole night sky."

But angels also move through the night. "Sunset is an angel weeping / holding out a bloody sword / no matter how I squint I cannot / make out what it's pointing toward" ("Pacing the Cage," *The Charity of Night*). Weeping over the violence of the day. Weeping, perhaps, in anticipation of the night. The artist cannot discern the meaning of the bloody sword. Later in the song Cockburn sings, "Sometimes the best map will not guide you / You can't see what's round the bend / Sometimes the road leads through dark places / Sometimes the darkness is your friend." Perhaps that angel will reveal itself more fully after the sun has gone down.

Cockburn is right that we need to "kick

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New & Noteworthy



From Stage to Screen

Pulitzer Prize finalist Anna Deavere Smith brings her critically acclaimed play *Notes from the Field* to the screen. Based on hundreds of interviews with students, teachers, parents, and administrators, the production brilliantly highlights the disturbing U.S. school-to-prison pipeline. HBO

Love for Creation

Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World presents practical, faithful responses to environmental issues. With scientific data and comprehensive biblical theology, Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo invite readers to explore their relationship with creation and the Creator. Zondervan

Just Conversation

The Movement Makes Us Human: An Interview with Dr. Vincent Harding on Mennonites, Vietnam, and MLK gives insights into the formation and life of the late civil rights leader and author of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Beyond Vietnam" speech. Mennonite pastor-activist Joanna Shenk, who spoke with Harding in 2011, includes biographical notes and context. Wipf & Stock

Time-Tested Tips

Judith Valente offers a way forward through contemporary discord by looking to the past. Rooted in the wisdom of St. Benedict, *How to Live: What the Rule of St. Benedict Teaches Us About Happiness, Meaning, and Community* provides ideas for how to have a more peaceful and purposeful life. Hampton Roads

A Gentle Witness

MISTER ROGERS' *Neighborhood* began running on U.S. public television just over 50 years ago, in February 1968. The anniversary was marked in March by the airing of a tribute special, *Mister Rogers: It's You I Like*, on PBS and the release of a Mister Rogers stamp by the U.S. Postal Service. In June, a documentary, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* by Oscar-winning director Morgan Neville, will hit the theaters. And, in Hollywood, a Fred Rogers biopic is forthcoming, starring Tom Hanks as the man in the sweater.

Rogers, who off-screen was an ordained mainline Presbyterian minister, was most famous as a sort of pastor to the nation's preschoolers. Every day he looked into the camera and conducted a calm, face-to-face conversation with the kids about their feelings, especially their fears. Usually those discussions would lead into a Rogers-composed song. Then Rogers would dramatize those lessons in the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe*, where several



Fred Rogers and King Friday XIII in the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe*.

Getty Images

and their parents find ways to live with the horror of the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Throughout the next three decades, as declining wages and rapidly shifting cultural norms put American families under unprecedented stress, Fred Rogers was there, providing a secure island of love and goodness for the country's children. His last new episode aired on Aug. 31, 2001, just before all hell broke loose again. Rogers died two years later, from stomach cancer, at age 74.

At my house, the Mister Rogers era began around 1994, when our first child was 2, and continued for another decade, until our local PBS station stopped airing the reruns when our youngest child was 5. I will never forget one of the very first episodes I watched with our oldest son. Earlier in the show, Mister Rogers had shown the children a video of how people make orange juice that visited an orange grove and a juice factory.

Then, in the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe*, one of the human regulars, Lady Aberlin, appeared carrying a tray with a cut-glass pitcher full of orange juice and several small cups. She walked slowly and ceremoniously among the puppet characters, sharing the juice, holding the cup

up to each puppet's mouth to let it "drink." She explained to one of the characters that "since we're neighbors, somehow I wanted us all to have something out of the same pitcher, a little part of the same orange." Later Mister Rogers commented that it made Lady Aberlin "feel good to give each person something from her one pitcher."

I was floored. That sequence was nothing more, or less, than a lightly secularized re-enactment of what happens on the horizontal plane in the sacrament of Holy Communion. And Rev. Fred Rogers had to have known it.

That was as explicit as the Christianity ever got on the show, but it was also a pretty typical episode. Day after day, year after year, decade after decade, in his own quiet, thoughtful, and respectful way, Mister Rogers did more to share the living presence of Jesus Christ through the medium of television than all the unctuous televangelists ever have or ever will.

There will never be another like him. So, in this anniversary year, all we can say is: Fred Rogers, pray for us ... please. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

Fred Rogers was there, providing a secure island of love and goodness for the country's children.

puppet characters, most voiced by Rogers, and a few other adult humans populated a fanciful parallel universe.

When *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* started, the U.S. seemed to be falling apart. The Tet Offensive was raging in Vietnam, and the slaughter seemed futile and endless. Meanwhile, in his first week on the air, Mister Rogers had King Friday XIII of the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe* building a wall around his castle to keep out people who wanted "change." Later that year Rogers would host an evening special that tried to help children

Continued from Page 37

at the darkness.” But kicking at the darkness without wrestling with angels, without contesting the state of the world with the Creator, is self-defeating human bravado. Cockburn knows this. No wonder he sings of an “aching in my hipbone” (“Open,” *You’ve Never Seen Everything*). That’s what happens when you contend with angels.

Now a denizen of the U.S., this Canadian singer-songwriter opens his new album self-reflectively with “States I’m In.” Old themes return as the song begins with the setting sun, a “curtain going up on the night time shadow play.” We are taken through a dark night of the soul replete with distorted reality, obsession, delusion, frustration, and vulnerability. But the night is not endless. Indeed, in the last verse we hear of “structures of darkness that the dawn corrodes / into the title montage of a new episode / whisper wells up from the deeps untrod / overthrows its channel and spreads abroad.” Whispers, rumors, dawn bursting forth. Kind of what we need these days, isn’t it? A new episode that will break the depressing monotony of what plays out on our screens and Twitter feeds.

There is deep spirituality on this album. Playing off the 13th century hymn “Stabat Mater,” Cockburn takes his place beside Mary, bearing witness to the cross. But “Stab at Matter” takes an apocalyptic turn as he bears witness to a world still hanging on that cross: “you got lamentation / you got dislocation / sirens wailing and the walls come down.” But there is hope in these falling walls. “You got transformation / thunder shaking / seal is broken and the spirit flies.” The empire might be imploding and the temples of our civic religion trembling, but all is a sign that “the Lord draws nigh.”

Some listeners will hear echoes of both Cockburn’s more explicitly Christian imagery of the ’70s together with the political edge of his repertoire from the ’80s on. But this is a political and environmental spirituality tried and tested by life on the road, the life of pilgrimage: temptations, dead ends, and miraculous moments of light and hope.

Not surprisingly, there have been angels: “forty years of days and nights—angels hovering near / kept me moving forward though the way was far from clear” (“Forty Years in the Wilderness”). But this time the angels



Anthony Hopkins and Jodie Foster in *The Silence of the Lambs*

WHAT HORROR CAN SHOW

IT’S A QUARTER of a century since most of us discovered Hannibal Lecter, the iconic serial killer of *The Silence of the Lambs*—which has just been restored and rereleased for home viewing by Criterion. Lecter had already been played by Brian Cox in 1986’s *Manhunter*, but Anthony Hopkins made him a household name.

But as directed by the thoughtful Jonathan Demme, the movie’s primary purpose was to feature Jodie Foster as FBI agent Clarice Starling, who Foster described as one young woman trying to save the life of another. I remember being thrilled and terrified watching, but I was always uncomfortable with the fact that I ended up liking the bad guy.

Fictional anti-heroes are popular, I suppose, because they allow us to indulge our shadow sides and may even provide a bit of healthy catharsis. Well-made horror movies can be a bit of fun—and they can say something meaningful, too, especially when they invite us to look at the demons within ourselves, not just in the faces of people we don’t like. However, there’s a fine line between letting off psychological steam and reasserting the scapegoat mechanism that leaves the whole world blind.

The Silence of the Lambs is a complex

film. At the time of its release, mainstream movies did not typically feature a woman claiming her power, doggedly pursuing the truth, not relying on a man to save her. In Foster’s beautifully nuanced portrayal of a person dealing with and trying to reduce trauma, the audience stepped into a rarely shown and important perspective: *what women see*.

On the other hand, the film has been rightly criticized for engaging in cruel anti-LGBTQ stereotypes, not to mention the fact that the characterization of Lecter as a psychopath who can show empathy when he feels like it can’t be taken seriously.

Beyond that is the notion that what draws us to such stories is the fear that it might happen to us—but as psychologist Steven Pinker says, “The cure for these biases is numeracy” (that is, a basic understanding of statistics). Nightmare scenarios like those in *The Silence of the Lambs* are extremely rare—but these days we’re seeing that the courage of women like Clarice Starling is everywhere. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.

speak: “And they said / take up your load / run south to the road / turn to the setting sun / sun going down / got to cover some ground / before everything comes undone.” In this unspeakably beautiful song, Cockburn bears witness to the journey. You may be limping, bearing the scars of the struggle, bent over and tired, but there is another night coming.

You’ve got more ground to cover before it all comes undone. If that were it, some of us just might give up, say our bodies and souls can’t take anymore. But then, almost at the end of the album, Cockburn invites us onto the “Jesus Train.” In this driving gospel song, he sings, “standing on the platform / awed by the power / I feel the fire of love / feel the hand upon my shoulder / saying

‘brother climb aboard’ / I’m on the Jesus train.” Grace, my friends, pure grace. Can’t walk anymore? Are you derailed and desperate? Then get on board the train to the City of God.

Bruce Cockburn makes no pretense of being a spiritual guide, prophet, or even a conductor on the Jesus train. He’s simply bearing witness as a limping sojourner who is good company on this pilgrimage called Christian faith. ■

Brian J. Walsh is a Christian Reformed campus minister at the University of Toronto, adjunct theology professor, and author of several books, including Kicking at the Darkness: Bruce Cockburn and the Christian Imagination.

Reviewed by Sharon Delgado

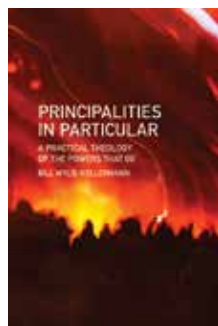
THE SPIRITUALITY OF RESISTANCE

Principalities in Particular: A Practical Theology of the Powers That Be,
by Bill Wylie-Kellermann. Fortress Press

FOR DECADES, pastor, activist, and scholar Bill Wylie-Kellermann has kept alive and furthered a theology of the biblical “powers and principalities” (Romans 8:38; Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 6:12), in the tradition of William Stringfellow and Walter Wink. *Principalities in Particular* is a compilation of his essays, rooted in applied struggle and practice, on these invisible but embodied forces that shape and often dominate human life.

Through stories of engaging specific principalities over time, Wylie-Kellermann brings an abstract concept to life. He explores racism, nuclear weapons, sports, family systems, corporate globalization, slavery, the drug powers, war, the Trump presidency, the global economy, and other principalities, immersing readers in a worldview that perceives not only their outer manifestations, but their inner realities as well.

One example is the corporate-friendly system of emergency management that has replaced democracy in controlling the author’s home city of Detroit and other black-majority cities in Michigan.



Wylie-Kellermann portrays local community struggles as fighting (nonviolently) for the soul of the city. He describes a statue called “The Spirit of Detroit,” which stands near City Hall, providing a focus and gathering place for community activists. In a similar vein, he tells of an interfaith group that drafted letters to “The Angel of Detroit,” calling the city back to its better nature and true vocation in service of life.

Wylie-Kellermann claims that “half of any struggle is a spiritual battle.” What is at stake is not simply a specific desired outcome, but also human healing and liberation. “We are complicit in our own captivity. ... The healing of the planet and the healing of ourselves, inside and out, are one.”

Principalities in Particular inspires and equips readers to rise to this challenge. The author invites readers into a process of inquiry, especially related to principalities in one’s own neighborhood, and to engagement that may lead to both personal and social transformation: “The struggle before us remains necessarily two-handed or two-edged, fusing social analysis and

institutional reconstruction with discernment, prayer, and worship-based action.” Such activism calls for discipline and creativity: “Prayer and fasting and public worship and singing and signs of imagination are among the tactics of any movement that knows it wrestles not merely with flesh and blood.” This book illustrates the difficulties, but also the triumphs, of such engagement.

One of Wylie-Kellermann’s insights is that we humans fall into the trap of seeking justification through the powers, rather than by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). For example, Christians may find identity and worth through their participation in and loyalty to a church. But as the author points out, the church itself is a principality, as prone as any other to seeking its own survival by enlisting human beings in its service. Consequently, churches may endorse belief systems, practices, or policies that further “the powers of empire.” On the other hand, “to be church as exemplary power in this present moment is to be freed of white supremacy, patriarchy, idolatrous patriotism, heterocentrism, mammon, militarism, consumer materialism, all the divisions and ideologies of domination.”

Particularly dangerous, warns Wylie-Kellermann, is justification offered through “the devotion of national populism,” currently exemplified by the presidency of Donald Trump. “Trump’s theology frames justification, mediated by the nation and its leader, as conferred upon ‘the patriotic people’... This justification ... goes hand in hand with the unleashing of the dominating spirit. Notably, it is the offer of salvation without repentance.”

The motivation to refuse complicity and resist the powers is a spiritual effect of reading this book. Wylie-Kellermann challenges readers to stay awake, resist dehumanization by the principalities, work for liberation, and live in freedom: “Death appears to reign. But it is undone. Live in the freedom of the resurrection. In short, dear friends: Be not awed by anything but the God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead.” ■

Sharon Delgado is a retired United Methodist clergywoman and author of Love in a Time of Climate Change and Shaking the Gates of Hell.

Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann

A SCHOLAR'S FAITH

The Re-birth of a Born-Again Christian: A Memoir, by James A. Sanders.
Cascade Books.

JIM SANDERS IS among the most respected and influential world-class Old Testament scholars of the last (my) generation. His signature interpretive impulse is what he calls a “monotheizing process.” By this Sanders means an urge toward affirmation of and obedience to the one true God, an affirmation and obedience that issues in love of the enemy in a way that requires dialogic engagement. By the term “process” Sanders insists that “monotheizing” is a dynamic, ongoing act that never reaches closure but always invites new energy and imagination. Thus, one can find in Sanders’ work both large-hearted energy and passion.

The present book is a narrative account of his life, attentive to two important themes. It traces Sanders’ maturation as a scholar with a teaching career at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Union Theological Seminary, and Claremont School of Theology. Sanders’ great scholarly work has been his generative contribution to textual matters, with an initial focus on the Dead Sea Scrolls and then work at the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center in Claremont, Calif., where he was the key figure.

That scholarly maturation is matched in the narrative by an account of how Sanders has emerged as a powerful and insistent advocate for social justice. In his telling he grew up in South Memphis in a community that practiced racial apartheid with what he terms an “iron curtain” between whites and blacks, reinforced by an evangelicalism of the privatizing kind.

The turning point for Sanders was his college and seminary experience at Vanderbilt University. He has very little to say about his formal study in those degree programs. What counts in his memory is his involvement in campus Christian ministry programs where he came to understand the urgency of social ethics that forcefully summoned him beyond his initial evangelicalism. Led by good mentoring,

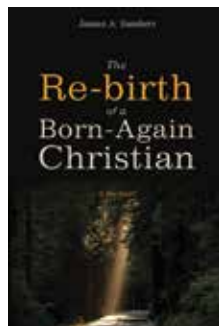
he discerned the systemic practice of injustice that contradicted his newly aware sense of the gospel.

That contradiction required him to make decisions that would shape his adult life: “There developed a pitched battle inside me,” Sanders writes, “between my head and my heart—that was until I had a second ‘saving’ experience in college when I learned it didn’t have to be that way but that I could worship God as an integrated, whole person.”

Beginning with racism, Sanders over time engaged in advocacy concerning gender equality, full rights for LGBTQ people, and political and civil rights for Palestinians that brought him into conflict with his Jewish friends. He actively became concerned for global warming in the face of the deniers of scientific data and fought against the illusions of “creationism.” He reports that his concern with institutional injustice, most particularly at Union Seminary, got him into enough “hot water” that he was finally glad to depart to end up at Claremont, where he completed his teaching career.

I can think of two reasons this book merits attention and study. First, it is important that we hear the personal stories of those who have become defining leaders for us. But second, Sanders’ story is a compelling example of how serious critical learning and passionate social faith go together. Sanders refuses to tone down the claims of faith for his learning. And he refuses to dumb down his learning in the interest of faith. He holds the two together in a persuasive and instructive way. I am glad to commend this book along with my respect and affection for its author. His is a life well-lived from which we may learn and for which we may be grateful to God. ■

Walter Brueggemann is professor emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary.



Singer Joy Ike

Reviewed by Christina Colón

MUSIC FOR TURBULENT TIMES

Bigger Than Your Box, by Joy Ike.
joyike.com

WITH THE ONGOING shattering of silence through the #MeToo movement and a record number of women running for office, 2018 feels unstoppable in its forward movement. Infused with bold rhythms, Joy Ike’s latest album, *Bigger Than Your Box*, could easily serve as the soundtrack of this march.

While described by Ike as a “political album that has nothing to do with politics,” *Bigger Than Your Box* conjures up images of self-serving leaders, complacent neighbors, and waning nostalgia. “You may want to go back where you’ve come,” Ike sings in “Say Goodbye.” “But there’s nothing for you and it’s not an option.”

With hues of pop, gospel, and folk, the album is intentionally difficult to categorize, with each song unique enough to stand on its own. Together they tell a universal story about the struggle to be in relation with others, oneself, and God during turbulent times. Amid deportations, delayed aid, and restrictions to health care, the lyric “heavy the load but the hands are few” feels all too familiar. Like Ike, I too cry out, “I need assurance that You are here. ... I need endurance for the day.”

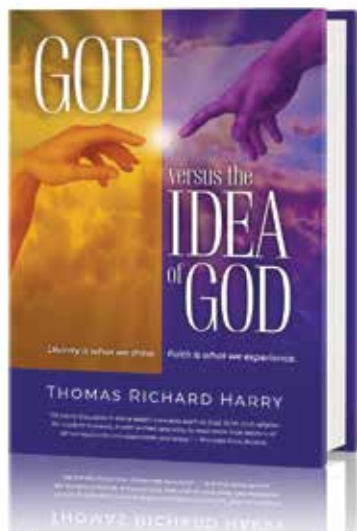
While Ike gives us space between notes to grieve, the album’s message is ultimately one of hope. “It’s not what you want, but your hope is coming,” Ike sings on the track “Hold On.” “There’s no waiting on the right time to move,” she adds in “Walk.”

Bringing life to dry bones and justice to a corrupt nation can feel like impossible tasks. *Bigger Than Your Box* reminds us to put “one foot in front of the other” and fix our hearts on “the ever-present Spirit of God that embraces us in our most helpless state.” ■

Christina Colón is an editorial assistant of Sojourners magazine.

Is it true?

The late theologian Karl Barth once suggested that's the most pressing question people ask themselves when hearing a sermon. That implies doubt! Religious doubt—up close and personal—is what TR Harry's challenging new book is all about. Maybe it will help you with this un-verbalized, most personal question. Maybe not!



It's a layman's critical look at his religion. It will be considered a bit controversial, and some are liable to be troubled by parts of the book. Nonetheless, it doesn't shy away from what surrounds that question, "Is it true?"

"Harry intrepidly confronts the deepest and most historically recalcitrant questions and impressively attempts to balance a skeptical epistemology with a profound respect for the significance of religion. In focusing on the subjective prominence of the idea of God, as opposed to metaphysical confirmation of God's existence, the author even manages to make this study germane to atheists."

— Kirkus Reviews

Learn more:
www.thomasrichardharry.com
or visit
www.godvstheideaofgod.com

Short Takes

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR...

Bruce Schoup

Bio: Bruce Schoup was pastor of Peace Congregational United Church of Christ in Clemson, S.C., when the church started a new outreach project. The goal: Build a mobile "tiny house" to serve as temporary residence for LGBTQ people kicked out of their homes due to their gender and sexual identities. Nationally, 40 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.

Website: thepeacechurch.org/tiny-house-project

1 What inspired the tiny house project?

Peace Church was founded with the intention of reaching out to the LGBTQ community, communicating the message that there are Christians in the area who not only welcome LGBTQ individuals, but affirm them. One day, I saw a tiny house on wheels built by an individual in the area and said, "You know, we can do that." And lo and behold, right about that same time, a grant offer came along [from the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries] for new initiatives in peace and justice. And the two ideas just sort of clicked together in my head: What a wonderful place that could ultimately be a safe house for LGBTQ people and lift up several concerns. It's a project that's easily replicable—tiny houses are a relatively inexpensive space that a person can claim as their own.

2 Has there been backlash? One of the things I tried to do, when we built on the weekend, was provide lunch for whoever came out and helped. I approached a few businesses in the area who provide meals, and some have been incredibly supportive. But there were some that I knew had supported Habitat for Humanity and other projects, but wouldn't support us. One person said, "This is the kind of thing that I, as a manager, can normally support, but when I read the details more carefully, I realized this might be one of those areas I couldn't, so I bounced it up to management, and management isn't giving me a go-ahead." Places that otherwise might give a discount suddenly went silent. Individuals who were initially enthusiastic to help were suddenly unavailable.

3 Tell me about someone who surprised you by affirming the project? I had a tough time finding a trailer for a lot of different reasons. I approached an individual who said, "Yes, I think I can help you out with providing a trailer." Later, he told me he didn't



want his name attached to the project, and it became clear that his religious ideology was, "Everyone is welcome, but [to LGBTQ people] you really ought to become straight."

We talked about the project, and he said, "But you know, I believe very strongly in helping people. And what your project is about is helping people, and it's my responsibility—as a member of the community—to support such efforts." And that's what I see the project being about. We have a lot of dividing taking place in our country: us vs. them. What are some ways we can reach out to individuals who fall into the "other" category?

4 What about the project deepened your faith and gave you hope? The number of people who said, "What a good project." I heard and saw many positive reactions. There was a construction manager who worked in a county that is very conservative, but he committed to the project as a way of affirming his stepson, who is gay. I ended up in conversations with individuals that just surprised me. I heard from individuals who I, otherwise, wouldn't have known the stories of.

—Interview by Da'Shawn Mosley

Illustration by Faith-Marie Zambie

Small Resurrections

IT IS HARD to tell time from inside a tomb. We cannot know how many minutes or hours Jesus' resurrection took. Traditionally, he was in the tomb for three days. But how long does it really take for someone to rise—or be raised—from the dead?

Some resurrections start at a mundane moment. Dorothy Day, for example, was sitting at the kitchen table in a crowded apartment in New York's East Village (writing a never-to-be published novel) when the French Catholic theologian Peter Maurin knocked on the door. "It was a long time before I really knew what Peter was talking about that first day," wrote Day, who went on to found the Catholic Worker movement with Maurin. "But he did make three points I thought I understood: founding a newspaper for clarification of thought, starting houses of hospitality, and organizing farming communes. I did not really think then of the latter two as having anything to do with me, but I did know about newspapers."

Some resurrections come through brutal suffering. Twenty-four-year-old Recy Taylor was left for dead in



for instigating the bus boycott a decade later, an opening salvo of the civil rights movement.

Closer to home, I can testify to another kind of resurrection. One family has owned a decaying, 100-year-old apartment building on my block for much of its history. They have deferred maintenance for about half that time. Seven years ago, the 50 or so low-income tenants living there were about to be forced out—until they began to organize.

They rallied neighbors to help them hold the owners accountable for the deplorable living conditions—which include pervasive mold; infestations of bed bugs, rats, and roaches; and a dangerously neglected boiler system.

Felipa Arias, the co-president of the tenants' association, has lived in the building for more than 20 years. Arias' husband pastors a small church, and she cleans office buildings. "Since most of us are low-income people, we can't afford to buy condominiums or go somewhere else," she said. "So all we can do is look for help and continue

fighting." Recently, the tenants won a legal case against the owners, who may be forced to rehabilitate the building and provide safe and clean housing for the tenants whose rent they have meticulously collected. Affordable housing may come back to life on one corner in rapidly gentrifying Washington, D.C.—and a resurgent community has been born between tenants and neighbors. Small resurrections.

When one is inside the tomb, it is hard to tell how long you have been in or when the stone might be rolled away. The tomb of dehumanization, distortion, and domination is holding many of us now. If resurrection happens over time and if one learns it by example (as Christianity implies), then stay alert. Listen sharply for the many sounds of scraping stones. Like the disciples (Mark 9:10), question among yourselves what this "rising again from the dead" could mean. ■



Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.

How long does it take to rise from the dead?

1944 on a dark road near Abbeville, Ala., by the six white men who kidnapped and raped her as she walked home from a prayer meeting at Rock Hill Holiness Church. "A few days later, a telephone rang at the NAACP branch office in Montgomery," wrote historian Danielle L. McGuire in *At the Dark End of the Street*. The president of the local branch promised to send his "best investigator" to speak with Recy Taylor. The investigator's name was Rosa Parks. As part of Park's organizing work on Taylor's case, she formed what would become the Montgomery Improvement Association, the leaders responsible

Rumors of Life

EASTERTIDE IS IN FULL STEAM—heading toward the culmination of Pentecost. This is a season of holy rumor: “He is not dead.” “I know someone who saw him.” “My brother touched him.” “He was right here on this shore.” “He just walked through the wall.”

Those holy rumors fanned the flames of a transformed and transforming faith. It is easy to forget that the rumors of Jesus’ resurrected life went against some pretty powerful evidence: his public shaming and crucifixion, the continuing dominance and oppression of the unholy Roman Empire. At one level, nothing had changed; at another, everything had changed.

We remember, commemorate, and live into the resurrection waiting for the redemption and resurrection of all creation in a world in which it looks like nothing has changed. But there are these holy rumors, insistent whispers, and raised voices that do not care who is listening. There are rumors of life that transcend death. Even without first-hand witnesses in our time and against all the evidence, the church affirms the witness of the women who saw and proclaimed the risen Christ.

We still assemble, a church made up of many nations, waiting for the outpouring of the

Holy Spirit to rekindle the embers of the holy faith that survives the empire’s best effort to extinguish it. The rumor is that God’s people will survive the present age and its empires, all evidence to the contrary.

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[MAY 6]

Pentecost Preview

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

THE HOLY SPIRIT cannot be contained. She will not be confined to Pentecost Sunday, and she will not be cut off from anyone because of who they or their people are.

The Jewish disciples in Acts 10 were shocked to discover that God would not withhold her Holy Spirit from the *unbaptized* gentiles. Their view of God was so small. She was just for people like them, people who thought and believed and practiced their religion just like them. Jewish identity in the world of the text functioned very much like race does now. And the spirit of God just blew through all those differences.

The characterization of God in Psalm 98:9 reveals a God whose faithfulness has no limits and no favorites: “God will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.” While some texts present the Israelites as God’s favorites above all others, that is not universally the case. The “peoples” in verse 9 are plural and include more than the children of Israel.

The Johannine texts address those who believe in Jesus as the son of God. In both

1 John 5:1-6 and John 15:9-17 the love between God and the believer is circular: “Everyone who loves the parent loves the child” (1 John 5:1) and “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (John 15:9).

Both models—a divine love that transcends boundaries (Acts 10 and Psalm 98) and the special love between Jesus, his followers, and his father (1 John 5 and John 15:9)—are authentically biblical.

[MAY 13]

The Testimony of Women

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

WOMEN DISCIPLES are completely absent from Peter’s recitation of the faith in this reading from Acts 1 as the lectionary presents it. However, if the 120 persons in Acts 1:15 are constituted of the people in Acts 1:13-14, then the math looks a little

different. There are 11 surviving (male) apostles and Jesus’ brothers (four, according to Matthew 13:55—plus sisters who would be grammatically included) who account for all the men in the 120 souls. The rest is made up of “certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus” (which could also include his sisters). That adds up to 105 women and 15 men.

In verses 21 and 22, the disciples seek a man to stand in as the 12th disciple and “become a witness with us to his resurrection.” They may have had a resurrection witness in the room, among the “certain women” in verse 14, but their culture taught them to discount the testimony of women.

We choose how we tell the story of our faith, and our choices matter. The biblical text is male-focused and women are often pawns in the text, reduced to biological functions. But women are also often more. Unfortunately, preaching, teaching, and text selection often minimizes or erases women even more than the biblical text does.

As the church moves toward Pentecost, we should seek to tell the sacred story in the most expansive and welcoming way possible, anticipating the boundary-transcending spirit of God who will not be withheld from anyone because of race, gender identity or expression, class, orientation, or any other particularity.

[MAY 20]

National Resurrection Day

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

DRY BONES, LIVE! The vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel is a vision of national resurrection. It is a prophecy fulfilled for the Israelites. The Babylonian exile came to an end. The remnant of Israel, largely constituted of the toppled Judean monarchy, returned to the home their ancestors clawed out for them. Their reunion was rocky. They no longer shared the same experience of their identity as the poorest of their people who had been left behind, resulting in deepening economic disparity. But they made it home. Their nation was indeed resurrected from the rubble as Ezekiel prophesied. But

what do the dry bones portend for us?

Most of us living in the United States today have never experienced invasion, occupation, and deportation—even though many immigrants have experienced these things in their countries of origin and despite the fact that this nation

What do the dry bones portend for us?

was founded through those very means. We are not in the position of the exiles to whom Ezekiel preached. (At least not yet.) We are more like the imperial powers in the background of the text for whom this word means that the people they plundered will one day be made whole.

History teaches us that nations fall and empires fail. The United States is subject to decline, and not just in influence. This passage bids us ask what it will look like when the peoples this nation has plundered are made whole—in their own land. What happens to the empire that once held them in thrall? In the biblical text, that empire was replaced by another, and another.

[MAY 27]

The God of Many Names

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

TRINITY SUNDAY IS known as “Heresy Sunday” because of the many new, inadvertent doctrines created by preachers trying to explain the Trinity. Dear reader, if you have been following these columns for the bulk of the past year, you may not be surprised to hear that trinitarian language is not the way I think or talk about God. Let me share some excerpts from my last sermon on a Trinity Sunday:

“The church has largely settled on one way of naming God, to our great poverty. The blessed, holy Trinity is one way and only one way of naming the God of many names, the God of Isaiah, the God of Jesus, and our God. It is not the only way and it is not my way ... God is beyond numbering and naming. The scriptures use many more than

three names or images to describe God and do not limit us to any. And the scriptures do not mention the Trinity at all. Three names make a nice poetic flourish. But God is not bound or limited by our limitations. God is One, and Two (incarnate and incorporeal), and Three, and Seven (the seven spirits of God are found in Revelation 1, 3, 4, and 5)—and God is Many and Ineffable.”

Trinity Sunday is perhaps not as much about how we number God but how we name her.

*warrior, king, mother, father,
righteous judge,
shepherd, banner, rock, fortress, deliverer,
peace, light, salvation,
strength and shield,
devouring fire
abiding presence ...*

How do you name God? ■

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

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I Could Stick My Head in the Sand



THANK GOODNESS it's Easter, and Lent has concluded, and you're back to eating chocolate or drinking wine, or finally stopped trying to meditate a half hour each night and just ended up noticing places that need dusting. But it's still February for me, and I'm only on Day 10 of giving up Facebook.

So far, I'm 0 for 10. I can't even do one in a row.

I didn't commit to giving up Facebook altogether. One can go only so long without pictures of friends' newborns or reposting that video of a hamster doing backward somersaults ... SO ADORABLE! But I *had* prayerfully pledged to stop making political comments online. And stop sharing elucidating articles from *The*



(I briefly smelled a Lenten loophole that would leave my evenings free to rant, but I couldn't confirm it on Google.)

I figured Lent would be the perfect time to give up Facebook, since while using it I had *already* given up good manners, civility, empathy, patience, forgiveness, and other things that should have been in the Boy Scout Law but weren't because they had to make room for "clean" and "thrifty." "Brave" I

could do; you have to be brave to wade into the fray with Christian primitives who believe an assault rifle is their God-given right. They have rights, to be sure, such as the right to remain silent. But I needed a cooling off period before I could resume my purifying crusade for truth, and then watch that hamster video again. (*So adorable!*)

I STARTED out this year calm enough, maintaining a hopeful perspective on our nation's politics, trying not to fear the worst (and savoring each guilty plea and incrimination that came to light), while patiently waiting for Robert Mueller to drop the other shoe. Fortunately, he appears to have lots of shoes.

But my calm didn't last. At a time when the scariest words in the English language are "The president is awake," I was daily quivering with angst over his latest utterance, causing my head to ache, my coffee to spill, and my cellphone to periodically leap into the toilet. (Yes, I'm

blaming that on the president, and no, I shouldn't be on Facebook in the bathroom.)

People say don't pay attention to Donald Trump's tweets, but for me it's an act of self-defense. His frequent diatribes challenging the rule of law are bad enough. But his rants against nuclear-armed nations frighten me to the core.

I *have* to pay attention, so I can protect my family. Should I gather them in the basement, which I've been meaning to stock with water and canned goods but instead left crowded with bicycles and boxes filled with stuffed animals and old term papers? (None of which are edible without LOTS of hot sauce.) They're nothing like the supplies stocked in the fallout shelters of my youth, whose owners became the envy of the neighborhood with their sealed underground bunkers and metal doors labeled "Family Only." A pointless exercise, of course, since scholars predict that post-nuclear life on earth would consist mainly of insects and grass. (Having recently eaten a grasshopper taco, I can personally attest to the durability of that life form. I was still chewing it on the way home.)

Actually, we might need the basement more for hiding from relatives whose false pieties I have railed against on Facebook. But not to worry. Their attention span lasts only until the next post from a Russian troll. ("Liberals deny that the Bible supports assault rifles!")

And then maybe we'd hear a knock on the basement door, and it would be Robert Mueller, his outstretched hands offering us blankets, fresh water, and some more high-protein grasshopper jerky. (We would have run out of our supply but still be chewing on the last batch.) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners magazine.

Or hide in the basement. Still can't decide.

New York Times, and stop forwarding snarky memes, and stop raging against demonstrable falsehoods posted by the angry and the prejudiced, specifically my relatives south of the Mason-Nixon Line. (How did these people get a computer!? Did they pass a background check first?)

Stopping Facebook cold turkey was the only remedy for a truth junkie like me. Because I was overdosing on outrage. The arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, but sometimes it needs to pull over, roll down the window, and shout, "Hey, Neanderthals, read a book!"

My addiction started out harmlessly enough with, you know, peer pressure. My friends were doing it—fighting the good fight for truth on the internet—and with my legendary skills as a writer person who can do, like, grammar stuff, I could be another righteous warrior in a world gone mad.

But it was making *me* mad, and I desperately needed to stop, for at least 40 days, as well as 40 nights.



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